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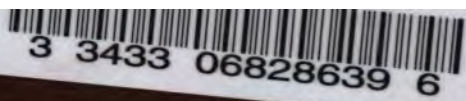
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APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY:

AND OTHER

SERMONS.



Not in
APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY, *8*
/

AND OTHER

S E R M O N S : ———

New York Public Library

Rev. William A. Treadway

Collection

Purchased May 1st 1897.

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ODDER AND STOUGHTON, 27, PATERNOSTER - ROW.

MDCCCLXIX.

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Not in A
POSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY, *14*

AND OTHER

SERMONS:

WITH A

SCRIPTURE STUDY.

BY

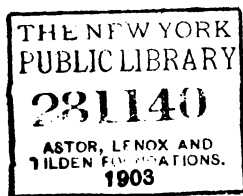
ROBERT AINSLIE REDFORD, M.A., LL.B.

LONDON:

ADDER AND STOUGHTON, 27, PATERNOSTER-RROW.

MDCCCLXIX.

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HULL: KIRK, PRINTER.

QV VALL
2007
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TO THE
MANY DEAR FRIENDS WITH WHOM I HAVE
BEEN ASSOCIATED,
DURING FOURTEEN YEARS OF MINISTERIAL LABOUR,
AT ALBION CHAPEL, HULL,
I WOULD AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE
THIS VOLUME.

ROBERT A. REDFORD.

ELM LODGE, HULL,
FEBRUARY 15, 1869.



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APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY.*

“FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST: FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH ; TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK.”—Romans i., 16.

GOD'S Word, though one, is multiform. One pen of inspiration has been used, by many scribes. The Scriptures are in different handwritings, though they all testify the same salvation. Each component ray of the sunlight possesses its own virtue. The quality of light remains, modified according to the hue. Each of the sacred writers, reflecting God's Word, imparts to it something of his own personality. The colours are various, but all combined absorb themselves into the pure white light of Eternal Truth. We should certainly deprive the words just read as a text, of their distinctive significance, if we regarded them apart from what may be called their personal, individual, quality. We must take them as they stand, and not generalise them into

* Addressed to the Ministers and Churches of the West-Riding Congregational Union, April 11th, 1866.

an abstract statement of doctrine. Egotistical, indeed, they are not, for the writer was as free from egotism as any man that ever lived. But there is an "Ego" which looks forth upon us from out of them almost with the vividness of a living countenance. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ!" One is ready to ask, at first who is this whose unblushing confidence is thus put in the forefront? Who is this, thus solemnly connecting his own feelings with the power of God, and the eternal salvation of Jew and Greek? He speaks as a representative man. He is the typical herald. He is the chief ambassador. Yea, in a sense, he is the steward of the Gospel; holding it in trust; dispensing it to the nations. Of the greatest importance it is to bring our minds under the influence, not alone of the doctrine proclaimed, but of the individuality manifested, and to yield ourselves to the touch of that spirit which is living in the words. We cannot, I think, doubt that there is a certain positive presentment of Christian faith and life testified in the text. When we connect such featured Christianity with the facts of St. Paul's history, the history of the greatest preacher, the most successful missionary, and the master-builder of the Christian Church, it would seem of the utmost moment to see it as it was. Into the same expression we should direct our own spiritual life, and become ambassador for Christ after the type and example of the chief apostle. The Pauline Christian is the kind of Christian

we should aim to be. Would we be made channels of divine power to the world, our faith and zeal must take their features much after his likeness, and realise themselves much in the form which he has so distinctly exemplified ; and he said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ !" I purpose, then, dear brethren, by God's help,

I. TO DESCRIBE THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THAT CHRISTIAN SPIRIT AND LIFE WHICH ARE EXPRESSED IN THE TEXT ; AND,

II. TO SHOW THEIR RELEVANCY TO OURSELVES IN OUR PRESENT POSITION AND WORK, AS SERVANTS OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL.

I.

1. At no epoch in the world's history, in no place, among no people, could a confidence like that expressed by St. Paul be brought to the test, as when his words were written to the Romans, and were read on the banks of the Tiber, at the beginning of the reign of Nero, the Roman Emperor. At that time a Christian community, taking its rise, doubtless, in the Jewish quarter, was slowly, but surely, adding to its numbers both native Romans and strangers from various parts of the world. Banished awhile by Claudius, the Jews left behind them those who, being Gentiles, though Christians, were not obnoxious to imperial fury. Synagogues were closed, but Christian teaching went

on. The youthful son of Agrippina little understood that, in recalling the banished Jews, he was making up the complement of Christians. The Gospel made rapid advances. The seed was sown broadcast, which was afterwards watered with the blood of martyrs, and the new doctrine was fairly lodged at the world's centre.

Now, in portraying the individual Christianity of the Apostle Paul, we shall find the first contour of his character suggested by connecting the text with the whole epistle on whose first page it stands. We might describe the Epistle to the Romans—an exposition of salvation, as the work of God in human nature. Underlying all that is said concerning Jew and Gentile, righteousness and unrighteousness, the law of sin and death and the law of the spirit of life, there is plainly the idea of a human *nature* which is fallen, and to which salvation must be brought. Sometimes it is the world of individual men which seems before the writer ; sometimes the professing Christians addressed ; sometimes his own personality is used, as a type of all others : the ruling idea is everywhere, that man's nature is ruined, and that his nature must be restored. He was not ashamed of the "Gospel of Christ" in Rome. And why ? Because he was not ashamed of its efficacy on human nature everywhere. No one knew better than Paul the Apostle, though he had never witnessed it with his own eyes, what a ruin that was into which the majesty of Rome was now rapidly falling. It was

the chaos, not of a forming, but of a dissolving world. The foundations of society were sapped. Roman law, the growth of centuries, was rooted in true morality. It was neither warlike skill, nor geographical advantage, that gave the Latin people their conquest of the world. Their social fabric was based on family religion. The nation was a nation of "*houses*." The leaders were "*the fathers*." But domestic virtue was undermined by prosperity. Rome became the prey to every kind of wickedness. Violence and conspiracy armed class against class. Social security and social dignity were lost. Half the population were slaves. Thousands of so-called citizens lived in beggary or by theft. The wealthy lay corrupting in the lap of luxury. Home and family were despised. Spectacles of cruelty and shame debauched the popular mind. The poor, huddled together in wretched habitations, dragged out their short and diseased life without hope of a better, bound to one another by no ties of pity or patriotism, crowding the amphitheatre to gloat over bloody scenes of suffering and death, and then turning their pampered passions against their neighbours in civil contests and riot. But such disorder, to the Christian Apostle, was not ultimate ruin. He looked deeper than a mere moralist would have done. He thought of the Gospel at Rome, not as the proclamation of a new moral system, or a new political doctrine, but as a message from God appealing to the innermost soul by its supernatural

facts, predictions, and announcements. The world is redeemed. The Son of Man, being "lifted up from the earth," has "drawn," shall yet draw, "all men unto Him." Yea! already, in that stricken metropolis of the world, a city of God has been founded. The walls of Salvation are rising, the bulwarks of Praise are coming forth among the ruins. A Christian of Corinth sends salutations to Christians at Rome. Electric thrills are beginning to run through the length and breadth of the world. A life which cannot die is appearing. On the palace of the haughty Cæsars shall yet be seen the Cross, sign and centre of a greater empire than Rome ever achieved. "Old things are passing away," "behold all things"—to the eye of faith—"are become new."

Now, there exists, in the present day, a defective kind of Christianity, which by its very contrast with St. Paul's, enables us to understand the secret of *his* success. All Christianity which is only moral, and not spiritual, is incapable of missionary work. The Epistle to the Romans preaches a great deal more than a standard of human life for this world. The righteousness of God is the hope of man. Society, with its wrongs and miseries, is the reflection, on a magnified scale, of the state of individual souls. The macrocosm is the copy of the microcosm. Men and man are really one. Salvation is not change of manners, reformation of life, regenera-

tion of the social state, though such must be its results. It is the power of God in the soul of man. It is life within framing itself into a living body, a perfect form. The righteousness of God becoming the righteousness of man. The spirituality of such a doctrine distinguishes it from all mere teaching of morality. The Apostle proclaimed it as "*a Gospel*." It was no matter of shame or fear that this power of God entered Rome in humble guise. A despised nation may first preach it. From house to house, perhaps in the lowest and poorest quarters, it creeps on quietly. No material guarantee supports it. No force or splendour surrounds it with prestige. But, cries this spiritual man, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." What are wealth, and the power of armed legions, and the pompous insignia of empire? Have they any existence, except what rests on an invisible, spiritual basis? "Thou couldest have no power at all against me," said Jesus to Pontius Pilate—the representative of Rome—"except it were given thee from above." Legions of angels attend the despised missionary; *they* are mightier than the legions of the emperor. The Lord Jesus Christ is the reigning King. His sceptre is greater than Cæsar's. Surely the Gospel is *power*, of which a Christian should not be ashamed, even though the world seems against it.

And what an empire was now being founded ! The Gospel claimed every soul of man as a subject of the Lord Jesus. It proclaimed every redeemed creature precious in the sight of God, our Heavenly Father. It called into rights, privileges, and expectations the most blessed, every portion of the human race, however degraded in appearance, however oppressed in fact, however despondent in spirit. The universality of the Grace was the universality of the Kingdom. St. Paul saw no limit to divine love ; therefore, he felt no fear for the sufficiency of divine power. Earthen vessels which carry the treasure, may be broken to pieces, dashed against the hard unbelief of men ; the very names of the messengers may be cast out in scorn ; but the excellency of the power remains, works still, wins its triumphs, is testified in a saved world. The faith which is truly spiritual, is boldly aggressive and missionary, saying, " I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ ! "

2. We can trace in these words, together with the loftiness of a spiritual faith, the humility of one filled with loyalty to Christ, and utterly subservient to the interests of Christ's kingdom. St. Paul was a Roman citizen, but he was a Greek by education. In the Greek mind there was no element more distinct, and more universally developed amid the variety of independent states, than the element of loyalty. The

individual was regarded as a unit of the state, but not as holding a separate position. He was a stone in the national edifice. The value of the structure lay in its totality. Loyalty to the commonwealth was undoubtedly a most powerful principle in Grecian life. But it lacked support in the moral character of the people. It remained for Christianity to rescue the true spirit of loyalty from extinction, by revealing the true King, and "the kingdom which cannot be moved." There was one majestic mind among the ancient Greeks, which seized, with all its strength, this vital truth, that private interests must be sacrificed to universal good ; and by his very constancy to it, even unto death, set forth the necessity of a power of God to deliver man from selfishness such as St. Paul proclaimed in the Gospel. The friends of Socrates planned his escape from prison, and besought him, seeing that his conscience acquitted him, to break through the restraint of mere state laws. "Consider the matter thus," he replied, "if, when we are on the point of running away, the laws themselves, the state herself, were to meet us ; stop us, and address us thus, 'Tell me, Socrates, what do you think to do ? Are you not, by the act which you are now attempting, doing all you can to destroy the laws, and the very state itself ?'" "Our country," he goes on to say, "should be dearer, more august, more holy, in our eyes, than father, mother, all our ancestors ; yea, than our own

life. Disloyal, how can we be happy? The laws of this world, and the laws of the next world, are kindred. He that is unfaithful on earth, will not be trusted, but condemned, beyond the grave." But, beautiful as such sentiments are in the philosopher's lips, they were not the salvation of Greece. Socrates himself could not preach them as a gospel to the multitude. It needed another message to be added. "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." The first Christians became the power of God in the world, because they first laid themselves as living sacrifices on the altar, and then, by His own grace, were transformed, by the renewing of their mind, from darkness to light, from weakness to strength. No dangers were terrible in the conscious presence of the Lord; no sufferings were shameful, compared with treachery to Jesus. The missionary spirit involves this perfect loyalty. It cannot exist without it. Those who deny Jesus His regal right, will never deny themselves for the sake of evangelising the world. The true Christian humility is identical with the spirit of allegiance, forgetting self because devoted to Christ; saying, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

3. And, yet, we must find other features in St. Paul's Christianity, before we have described it as it was. Might not his zeal have been fervent, and still narrow? He belonged to a nation which was separated from all others. He might have preached the Gospel with full confidence in its universal power, and still with Jewish expectation, that all the world would be moulded by it after his own national type. Such a Gospel would have suited the Sanhedrim, at Jerusalem, and would not have needed the Cross. But no Gentile was ever freer from such narrowness than Paul. He was cosmopolitan, in the best sense of the word. "There is no difference," he says, "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is no respect of persons with God." "Every one that believeth," is the only limit. In this new world, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for all are one in Christ Jesus." "For He is our peace who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace." Let us notice that this cosmopolitan feeling in the Apostle Paul was more than what would sometimes be called philanthropy. It was not alone that the Gospel taught him to compassionate fellow-creatures; but that the Gospel

proclaimed itself, in his hands, the power of God to *save* the world. Humanity, justice, sympathy, are too frequently passive virtues, until they are appealed to, called out by facts into aggressive activity, against the evil in the world. The distinction of the Christian ambassador was not alone his loving, pitiful heart but his positive, absorbing errand. It has always been somewhat of an enigma, to those who have only partially understood Christianity, that, while its teachings breathe the spirit of gentleness and love, its history has been marked by almost ceaseless strife, and under its banner have been fought the bloodiest battles of the world. Individual Christians are enigmatical to those who are strangers to the mysteries of Christ. Look at such a Christian as the Apostle. Is there not an intensity of conviction, an aggressiveness of zeal on behalf of truth, which, viewed from the standpoint of some men, even of our own day, would be called fanatical intolerance? What a salutation to append to his letter to Corinth, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha!" What an introduction to his letter to Galatia, "If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed!" Undoubtedly, the Christian missionary represents a doctrine which among all peoples, in all states of the world, tolerates no quiescence, until the power of God unto salvation has subdued all things unto itself. The Christian's

philanthropy is characterised by his love to Christ as its origin. Reading the writings of the representative Apostle, we shall certainly find much to perplex, if we look for nothing but a passive, complacent, negative kind of spirit—a sort of spiritual conservatism, accepting things as they are, and deprecating change and conflict. An almost warrior-tone rings in them. “We wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” “Quit ye like men ; be strong.” “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel ; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries : which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.” And throughout his argument, in his Epistle to the Romans, what an uncompromising single-mindedness testifies to the firmness of his attitude as a champion of truth ! And, yet, this soldierlike decision of character did not extrude affection, nor did it heat temper. The ruling idea of Christianity was that of a world subdued to Christ, that it might be filled with peace ; and so, the benevolence of the Christian missionary assumed the features of heroic enterprise. It was often the pity of the surgeon, as he probes the wound. The lines of complacency became broken with the energy of action.

There seems a necessity, in these days, for such remarks to be made. The modern spirit is broader in tone than the ancient. Commerce widens our sympathies; geographical discoveries advance our knowledge of nations. Political changes break down, one by one, our long-standing prejudices. We are all of us hoping the time is hastening, when—

“The kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.”

And, yet, it may be doubted, when we study the character of the great Christian, cosmopolitan, apostle, if the modern feeling is not departing from the Christian type, and becoming more like the passive indifference of a heathen philosopher, the careless optimism of the Epicurean, or the proud scorn of the Stoic. “A citizen of the world” certainly expresses a very different idea from the Christian citizenship. Breadth of sympathy too often means laxness of principle, and negative religion. Universal brotherhood, founded upon universal neglect of vital truth, must soon become universal anarchy. World-wide prosperity and mutual indulgence is not the Christian’s idea of the comity of nations. Some would have us secularise all national interests; unite into one Pantheon all forms of worship; eliminate all dogmatic earnestness; blend into undistinguishable uniformity of vagueness all systems of religious truth, and lower to one medium standard all national codes of morality. Such pre-

liminaries for a universal peace may find acceptance with multitudes in times like these ; but let us be sure, dear brethren, in the Apostle Paul they would only kindle a burning antagonism, they would only fix more firmly his attitude of unflinching and unyielding resistance. The conversation of the Christian is in heaven. He is the citizen of a state which will bear no rival ; which must supersede all others. Truth must never be compromised. Anti-Christ must never be treated with. We must "love neither the world, nor the things that are in the world." Our one King is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our one prayer is, "Thy kingdom come." Our one message is, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." And so, amid all contradictions and confusions, amid all "uncertain sounds," and false voices, of these times in which we live, we must cherish the only true cosmopolitanism, which says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

4. Before leaving this description of Apostolic Christianity, let me remind you of another feature indicated by the text. The faith which animated the Apostle Paul was, we have seen, eminently spiritual, humble, world-embracing ; it was, likewise, *eagerly expectant*. Though couched in language which

expresses no more than a universal truth, in regard to the Gospel, the confidence which is proclaimed in the text is plainly the confidence of foresight. At least, there is involved in it an *insight* which is the same as *foresight*; for, turned towards the future, it becomes prophecy. He who was not "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," foresaw what it would certainly accomplish. He was not merely enamoured of theory; he was devoted, body and soul, to the service of a "*power of God*" never henceforth inactive in the world. And the hopefulness of the Apostle was clear and direct! We find nothing like barren speculations about the future. One so full of active thoughts and with a mind so occupied with the highest themes would be little tempted to cast the horoscope of existing worldly powers, or attempt to mingle religion and politics. All is transparent simplicity, and, yet, exalted expectation. How striking it is, to contrast New Testament writings with the contemporary productions which issued from heathen sources! The rhetorical bombast, hollow declamation, and false sentiment of Roman literature, in the age of Nero, drew forth rebukes even from Seneca himself. And he, though a giant compared with the rest, could write the purest morality, and live an immoral life! Christian hopefulness never degenerates into rhapsody. And still, what sublime predictions we may trace in the language of St. Paul! The power of God was enteri-

Rome. What would it achieve? That was the world's centre. Everywhere Roman legions testified Roman power. Syria, Greece, Germany, Britain—where was there not the witness of this mighty power of imperial sway? He who had travelled “from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum;” he who had preached through Asia Minor and Macedonia, and southward to Athens and Corinth; among rude peasants, among inquisitive philosophers; among shrewd merchants at Ephesus, and among men of the world at Damascus; no careless observer of society, no shallow thinker on human nature, he was not ignorant of this world's power. He could estimate, one would think, as fairly as any man, the historical stage at which the world had arrived. And what do we find the fact? Philosophers were despondent, mystical, or cynical. Orators were false, extravagant; for the most part, tame in their wordiness. Religious teachers, under heathen systems, were dumb, and gave no sign. Paul, the Apostle of Christ, is full of hopeful energy, and blessed anticipations. Everywhere, among Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise; at the world's extremities, and at the world's metropolis, he never despairs, he never relaxes effort, he preaches the same Gospel. He is always sanguine, though he is often disbelieved and ridiculed. His horizon is never dark, though the space between is often filled with conflicting hosts. His spirit is never gloomy. His energies are never

paralysed with doubts. Weakness, there may be, in the instrument, but failure of the cause there cannot be. Jesus is "declared to be the Son of God with power." The testament of that divine will must be faithfully executed. "I am debtor," exclaims the trustee, "both to the Greek and to the barbarian ; both to the wise and to the unwise." Let the trust be fulfilled, let the mighty will be done. "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek

II.

And, now, beloved brethren, let me give these thoughts a more practical turn, and show their relevancy to ourselves, both to our position and to our work, as professed servants of Christ. These stirring words uttered by the first apostolic missionary, should sound as the battle-cry of our leader in the van ; they should call us on, as with a rush of passion, to smite the sin and misery around us ; the people of the Lord, "willing in the day of His power," "till His enemies be made His footstool." What are we ashamed of ? Why are we lagging behind ? Why do our strokes grow feeble ? Are we losing our faith in the Gospel ?

In a state of society like our own in England,

great deal is found, the result, in some sense, of Christian triumphs in former ages, and, yet, not positively Christian. We speak of our country as Christian, and of our civilisation as Christian. Is there no temptation to compromise the directness and distinctness of the Gospel, as a message appealing to the individual heart and conscience? Both in general literature and in religious systems, there seems some tendency to ignore the Gospel as a message. Stress is laid on the diffused power of Christianity over multitudes, and in common, coincident, facts of society. The action of the Christian Church is modified by the notion that the people are of themselves growing Christian as they grow civilised. Is there not a shrinking, in these days, from that closeness of spiritual attack upon unbelief, and that conspicuous holding forth of the Gospel standard, which marked our predecessors? Is there not a toning down of our appeals, a rounding off of the distinctive doctrinal statements of the Scriptures, a sentimentalising of our religious phraseology, which bespeak the relaxing of that aggressive spirit, once the ruling spirit of Christians in their practical religion? Doubtless, in many things, we have left our forefathers behind. Our knowledge is wider. Our view of life is profounder. There is no necessity that the language of Christian appeal should be an uneducated language. All the resources of modern thought, discovery, refinement, energy, may be

pressed into the work of direct proclamation of the Gospel. It is a wretched mistake to confound the simplicity of nature with the barrenness of barbarism. It is the mistake of Rousseau, and contributed much to the fanatical reaction of the French Revolution. Among earnest men of our own day there is an increasing love of simple speech. Clear intelligence shines through the language of business and of literature. The more it characterises our religious speaking and writing, displacing that rhetorical superfluity and vagueness which too often disguise the truth, the sooner shall we win the ear of all classes around us. And, especially is it to be wished, that a Pauline spirit of bold utterance, and direct proclamation, were more conspicuous in the teachings of our time. I am sure, dear brethren, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires no modification in any age, and there seem to be features in our modern English society which summon us to almost another Reformation in the cause of positive, heavenly, Truth, against popular delusions and prevailing tendencies. Allow me briefly to indicate some facts which may serve to stimulate our vigilance and effort.

1. It is scarcely possible to overrate the amount of real ignorance, as to spiritual things, still prevailing around us. General intelligence, acquaintance with the letter of Scripture, familiarity with pulpit phraseology,

may coexist with practical unbelief; and, in how many cases the root of that unbelief lies in ignorance! We may know a great deal about the Gospel, and still we may never have seized its essential truth. Many persuade themselves that they understand, and *do assent*; but remain ignorant notwithstanding. There is wanted more grappling with individual minds in conversation. Numbers in our congregations literally do not know that they *are* ignorant. Have we never met with instances? On the dying bed, the darkness has become visible: the soul has groped for light. Sometimes, near as it is, the gate of Peace has not been found. It is the absolute freedom of the Gospel which remains disguised. "*Religion*" is confounded with "*salvation*." Becoming "*religious*," or, as we hear it sometimes put, "*getting religion*," is regarded as the means of acceptance with God. The Grace, the free Grace into which we are invited, which, indeed, is already around us, is made a *conditional* thing, dependent on individual feelings. Conversion, repentance, faith, assurance, are all sought *in ourselves*, instead of *in the Gospel*. God's redeeming love is put second, and not first. And so, the attitude of multitudes is doubtful, hesitating, passive, joyless; not a living dependence on the Saviour, not a loving companionship of the Lord, not an eager expectation of glory. Oh! let us proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven at hand! Let us point to the open gate. Let us

invite sinners *to breathe* that atmosphere of love which already enfolds them, that they may live, and not die ! Let us not be “ashamed of the Gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

2. Again, these are days when a spreading *self-complacency* makes light of realities and obligations, and conceals the work of sin. Material comfort sets the mind at ease. Irreligion is becoming an extreme idea. Respectability and Christianity are almost convertible terms. Many, slipping down a smooth incline into perdition, think direct appeals almost impertinent. Shall we fear to break in upon such peace ? Shall we echo the false confidence, and, as sometimes is the case, go with such souls to the gate of Eternity without breaking the spell ? There seems no small danger that the regular services of religion are being substituted for the inward work of the Spirit. Sacred things are being made as pleasant as possible. And there is a kind of complacent *enjoyment of worship* which positively injures the soul by hiding it from itself. In the professed Church of Christ, an antinomian love of comfort is eating away the earnestness of some. We are asking after “quiet resting places” before our work is done, before our fight is fought. Our spiritual nature may be easily enervated with religious sentiment. Our Christian steadfastness may give way under the

influence of spiritual luxuries. How small a minority do the work that *is* done! We keep up a kind of spiritual "*standing army*," instead of being all "*volunteers*." Oh! let us remember, we bear witness to the power of God if we bear witness to the Gospel. This is no time to be at ease in Zion. The world still lieth in the wicked one. The standard rocks to and fro among the waving forces in deadly contest. Let us not sleep, as do others, but let us be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, making it each one his boast, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ!"

There are yet other noticeable facts which I must only just mention. The spirit of *doubt* is not confined, in these days, to scientific men, or even to the highly intellectual classes. It is spreading among the young. While fairly meeting all open criticism of Christianity, on its own ground, let us be sure there is in the Gospel—in the one fact of divine Love in a personal Redeemer—a single force which is deeper than all human deficiencies, stronger than all currents of intellectual change; more real than sermons and sects, systems of doctrine or methods of speech; which the world cannot gainsay, except to its own condemnation, and which will prove itself now, as always, "the power of God unto salvation."

And the darkest fact of all is "the troubled sea" of ungodliness around us, "which cannot rest, whose

waters cast up mire and dirt." All good influence combined do not overtake the growth of vice. While houses of God are barely occupied one day out of seven, houses of seductive amusement are crowded night after night. Wasteful excess, unhealthy self-indulgence, are demoralising thousands. A frivolous spirit is undermining thought and conscience, and making light of principles—leaving the masses an easy prey to superstition or infidelity. Our very religious services have to be suited to such a spirit. Novelties are devised to draw attention. Regular ministrations have to be perpetually varied to meet the fickleness of the worldly-minded. God grants that we may not, as a nation, be lulled into heathenish slumber, till the trumpet call of judgment wakes us to condemnation.

Once again, before concluding, let us come into contact with the lofty Christianity of St. Paul, that our last impression may be the necessity of copying such an example. We saw that his faith was *spiritual*. The Apostle did not tone down Christianity to the level of the age in which he preached. He declared the Gospel of fact; the name of a living, personal, Jesus, a present power of God. That was the lever with which he moved the mighty mass of heathenism, and overthrew it. *Let our Christianity be spiritual. Let us fully trust the sufficiency of the divine salvation. Let no desire to make our teaching interest, seduce u*


from the simplicity and directness of the Pauline method. The *depths* of human nature are the region of the Gospel's work. It will find them best when it is undisguised and unadulterated.

And let us imitate the apostolic *loyalty*. We want the same self-forgetful spirit which breathes through all the Epistles. We must be ready, at times, to ignore ecclesiastical differences, for the sake of united efforts. We must condescend to men of low estate. We must be more intent upon the salvation of individual souls, than upon connecting success with particular methods of work or organisation. We must be rid of formality. We must *not* hang the whole work of evangelisation on set discourses. We must *not* be afraid of conversation with individuals. We must supplement the pulpit more abundantly with various instrumentalities. Oh! let us be Pauline in our self-consecration and cheerful subservience to the Lord; not ashamed of any Christian enterprise, because not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

Again, the Christian activity which aims at apostolic success must be *large-hearted and cosmopolitan*. Nothing human is foreign to the Christian. Scoffers are about us now-a-days, who would fain paralyse our efforts for the lowest portions of our race. The very life of our Christianity is bound up with the unity of mankind. We cannot afford to despise any human creature, however degraded. And how much meaning

there is in the growing application of that word "mission," which was first used in reference to distant lands, but now seems endlessly significant! *Missions* to the heathen led the way; now we have home missions, town missions, Bible missions, continental missions, missions to the Jews. The Christian life is coming to be viewed as a missionary life, after the Master's words, when he said, "As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

And, lastly, let us recognise the necessity for an *eager outlook* towards the future like the Apostle's—a faith which attempts great things, because it expects great things. Surely, the aspect of things everywhere encourages the sanguine spirit of the true believer. A few months in these eventful days are enough to change our horizon almost as though we looked on a new earth. In every direction there is movement, the sign of existing life, of working power, of future change. We feel sometimes discouraged, because the minds around us seem confused and distrustful, and the results of Christian work are not speedily ascertained. Let us remember that the period when St. Paul declared his confidence was even more a transition period than our own. The Spirit of God, let us be sure, is brooding over the troubled waters of our social state. A new order will soon be seen beginning to emerge out of the chaos. The Sabbath of the world



not distant. Is not this the time of preparation ?
 ; to change the allusion, we may say, the wilderness
 traversed, the Jordan has been crossed, the ark of
 the Lord, borne by the sacred priests, is safe among
 ; it only remains that the enemies be conquered
 and cast out, and that the tribes of the Lord take up
 their lot in "the rest and the inheritance."

"Now, Christians, hold your own : the land before ye
 Is open. Win your way, and take your rest !
 So sounds our war-note ; but our path of glory,
 By many a cloud is darkened and unblest,
 And daily as we downward glide,
 Life's ebbing stream, on either side,
 Shows at each turn some mouldering hope or joy ;
 The man seems following still the funeral of the boy !

Open our eyes, thou Sun of Light and Gladness,
 That we may see that glorious world of Thine !
 It shines for us in vain, while drooping sadness
 Enfolds us here like mist. Come, Power benign !
 Touch our chill'd hearts with vernal smile,
 Our wintry course do Thou beguile,
 Nor by the wayside ruins let us mourn,
 Who have the eternal towers for our appointed bourne !"

May the Spirit of Him who is "with us always, even
 to the end of the world," quicken us to zeal, self-
 crifice, steadfastness, large-heartedness, and a lively
 expectation, after the pattern of that greatest of

missionaries, and most successful of evangelists—the Apostle Paul ; and, then, we shall testify as he, “ I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”





LIVELIHOOD.

AN ADDRESS TO MEN OF BUSINESS.*

“CONSIDER THE LILIES HOW THEY GROW: THEY TOIL NOT, THEY SPIN NOT; AND YET I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY WAS NOT ARRAYED LIKE ONE OF THESE.”—Luke xii., 27.

WE hear it sometimes said that men of business cannot be justly judged by any whose experience lies apart from what we call the world's affairs, and who are skilled more in speculation than in action. It must be granted, in a certain sense. The pulpit is not the place from which prudent maxims, shrewd hints, far-seeing counsels, capable of application to involved and intricate arrangements in the social state, ought to be expected. Wisdom to win souls neither is fetched *from* places of business, nor is very often fetched *to* them. And the minister of Christ who pretends to no authority out of his proper sphere, will not feel himself dishonoured by an ignorance

* Delivered at Albion Chapel, Hull, October 24th, 1858.

which rather bespeaks his consecration to a holy office than his want of sympathy with men, or his want of tact in dealing with their hearts. When, however, men of business shut themselves up, as they sometimes do in conventional principles and usages, saying, with self-complacent pride, "No admittance to your spiritual truths, except on some profitable errand; keep religion to the Sabbath and the sanctuary; let the world's clock be wound up with its own key, and let none but the practical hand presume to regulate its movements;" they deny, surely, their own place in God's family, and they contradict the fundamental fact on which all social confidence and harmony are resting, namely, that the true and the right are universal and that wherever we are, and wherever we work, one of God's great principles knocks at the door for admission, none must hinder, none must scorn, nor must disobey.

So much moral delinquency has been exposed and late; sins so heinous, wrongs and disasters so deplorable, have we been called to witness, that everywhere the question naturally suggests itself—Are we not all at fault, for calling things so often by the wrong names, and for suffering, as we do, moral distinctions to be confused, sacred laws to be wrapped about by superficial customs, and the very foundation of our happiness and order to be sapped and undermined? What men *do* always will, always must

nd on what they *are*. And what they are, it is a question of their education, or profession, or position in the world alone ; but of their hearts, their intellectual feelings, their pervading spirit. A godly man have a godly method of performing the commonest most artificial of tasks ; and a godly state of society will be just as certainly an industrious, clever, vigorous state, as it will assuredly be a prayerful, peaceful, pure, and spiritual state.

We must all admit that a great deal needs to be remedied, that abuses exist, that the crises and commercial disasters which from time to time occur are symptoms of unhealthy action—indications of disorder, deep-seated and destructive. Clever men, engaged in the world's affairs, point us to defects in the social machinery, faults in the arrangement of things, and suppose it possible to banish all confusion and disorder henceforth, by prescribing better regulations and forbidding unsound practices. But who earnestly reflects upon the subject, fails to see that the evils root themselves far deeper than formal changes go. A spiritual reformation must accompany these mere external alterations ; otherwise, they give another form to the disease, without in the least restraining, except for a time, its influence. Dishonest speculation cannot be really remedied by any remedy which leaves men's feelings unchanged ; and each other still the same, and only

cuts off their opportunities of wrong, eradicating nothing of the selfishness and avarice which quite as often make temptations for themselves, as they are tempted from without. The pulpit must reform the counting-house, not by writing up new rules of business, needful as they are, perhaps, but by sending from God's house, to the world's market, men with another spirit, impelled by nobler motives, imbued with better principles, governed and controlled by Christ-like feelings. Therefore, as it seems to me, religious teachers must, if they would magnify their office, faithfully declare the message of God's Word, just as it speaks to every class among their fellow-creature and must be bold and wise to prove that there is Christianity just as healthy, and sincere, and incorrupt for the men of toil as for the men of leisure—in the pushing, striving, throng, as in the solitary chamber.

There is a Christian view of *livelihood*, of what man's life depends upon. It can be shown that there are no conditions existing at present which *oblige* me to depart the least from a pure and lofty Christianity for the sake of livelihood ; and, though the means of life have to be earned by strenuous endeavour, *in* *an* *from* a world far from Christian, at present, in its habits and its rules, yet to gain those means need not be to lose our opportunities of spiritual growth, but on the other hand, to find them and to use them. The Christianity of busy men, not simply may be, but

ought to be, the firmest and most flourishing of all. Our Lord Jesus, when he preached, had to deal with the same corrupt tendencies in human hearts, the same *kind* of errors in the lives of men, against which His doctrines set themselves at present. The world has altered its appearance ; temptations have assumed different forms ; society has changed in many of its features ; but the truths spoken by the Saviour find their application just as certainly now as they did eighteen centuries ago. Were He born into the world in this age of excitement, industry, and advancing wealth, He would denounce the same sins, and proclaim the same facts, and inculcate the same principles. He would place Himself where men are busiest and most intensely anxious in their work. He would go to them at the very height of their contest with the difficulties and misfortunes of the world, and in the midst of all their present circumstances and conditions of success He would repeat that most profound and beautiful command, " Consider the lilies how they grow : they toil not, they spin not ; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

The life of a flower would seem, at first, so out of all comparison with a human life, so inferior in value and importance, that we almost wonder at the Saviour's words. It would be well enough to "consider

the lilies" for the sake of admiring their chaste beauty and beholding in them the exquisite workmanship of God ; but the very fact referred to in the passage seems to separate them almost infinitely from a child of Adam : "they toil not, they spin not." We are *obliged* to toil. Nature denies us what it freely gives the flower, except on the condition of the toil, yet the constant and laborious fighting with opposite difficulties. Yet, says the Son of God, "consider the lilies how they grow!" No one doubts, looking at that exquisite texture of the petals, examining closely those wonderful pencillings and lovely tints, which none can imitate except imperfectly, that "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these;" but lay no blame on Solomon, for not clothing himself with as spotless a robe as the lily's. God made the little flower with His own hand ; but He put intelligence and craft in the human being, that the clothing and feeding his own body might develop and beautify his soul. The end which the flower fulfils has been chosen by its Maker, just as truly as the purpose of an angel's life ; and it is no dishonour to the flower that that end looks small and unimportant. God calls it into being. God takes care of its existence. It lives its little life peacefully, purely, to the world's orna- ment and happiness, and to the great God's satisfaction. It dies, because it has lived out all its life ; and its beauty has not been wasted, because it has not been abused

Rise, then, from the flower to the man. "If God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will He clothe" *man*—created in his Maker's image, and commissioned to fulfil unspeakable responsibilities! That is to say, how can it be necessary for God's most noble creature on the earth, in the smallest degree to abrogate his higher nature, forget the end of his existence, and deny his birthright, for the sake of that which the same Hand that formed him lavishes with such abundance on the tiny flower, born for a day, and fitted to accomplish only a passing, inconsiderable, end?

Let us see this wonderful argument of our Lord's as clearly as possible. Here is an immortal creature, wilfully crushing spiritual thought and feeling in the crowd of mere material employments and anxieties. He knows that he is born for something nobler than amassing gold, or drudging in the dull routine of common things to satisfy his bodily necessities; but he sinks at last so low that the staple of his mind, the very substance of his intellectual existence, may be summed up thus, "What shall I eat; what shall I drink; wherewithal shall I be clothed?" Why, that little fading lily utterly condemns the man! See what care God takes of the senseless, insignificant, creature of His hand—meant only to be looked at and admired! How He fashions it with infinite regularity,

and adorns it with the loveliness of heaven! And this responsible and spiritual being, "looking before and after," conscious of irrepressible desires and yearnings after something greater than himself; able truly to rest nowhere, but in that which is divine and everlasting; this heaven-invited, heaven-instructed *man* will not believe himself the object of a care and kindness which is lavished on the grass beneath his feet! He distrusts God. He denies God's faithfulness and goodness. He sells himself to slavery and moral death. And the simplest objects that he looks upon convict him of his wickedness and folly. He *must* be awfully wrong, for he makes the end of his life, to eat, drink, and be clothed! And the butterfly sipping nectar, or the lily blooming in array more royal than the highest king's, puts him to the blush and shames him for his failure.

Evidently, therefore, when the Saviour sends us to the flowers of the field to find instruction, He intends us to awake to that which is most noble in ourselves, and would call us from a life worthy only of the fading plant into that blessed fellowship with God of which our nature is created capable. He did not mean, literally, fling all care away except about another world, and the highest spiritual themes. He did not mean, make no effort to be clothed and fed, worthily and happily; but He meant, think about these things, labour for these things, not as beasts but

as men ; not as creatures living for an hour, but as spirits destined for eternity. Seek the *first* first, and the *last* last ; not the *last* first, and the *first* last. Be God's chosen children, feeding on His smile, and waiting on His word, as well in the warehouse as in the temple, as well with the tool in hand as with the prayer and praise in your lips.

Now, let me remind you of some considerations and facts which will show the application of our Lord's injunction, and enforce it on our hearts. It must be admitted, then :—

1. *Livelihood has to be obtained, in the great majority of instances, by an exercise of self-dependence.* Let us look at that fact, and try to give it an interpretation according to Christian truths and principles. Religious or not, this one thing we can unhesitatingly say of any man, that to him prosperity in life will always be a dream and distant mirage, if he lacks all confidence in self. Has he talents ? He can use them aptly, if he understands them ; he will lose their value, if he forgets their presence. Has he advantages, physical, educational, providential ? Let his eyes be quick to find them, his hand steady to use them. Has he superiority of any kind ? Let him be thankful for the higher place assigned him, and be prompt to take his post. The world says this, and the world is right so far.

Christianity cannot be inconsistent with an honest, high-souled, self-dependence. "Here I am," says the hard-worked man of business, "thrown upon my own resources. To beg, I am ashamed ; yes, not only my neighbour's door, but at my neighbour's table, his ledger. Strength is in me ; capabilities are in me, and, by God's help, they shall gain me a livelihood. On no fellow-creature's alms will I depend ; to the pity of my friends will I be subject. I was born to be free, and no bondage will I bear!" No if Christianity condemned such words, Christianity would give the lie to noble instincts of our nature and condemn the world to be as one vast slave state, the many crouching at the feet of the few—like the poor negro, lashed into industry by a tyrant's whip. Selfishness must be distinguished from an independent spirit ; disregard of others from reliance on ourselves. Serving your neighbour a *bad* turn to serve yourself a *good* one ; that is unchristian *selfishness*. Guarding your own interests, while the push of multitudes threatens them with ruin ; giving free play to your energies and talents, when the honourable opportunities are offered ; that is the manly *self-restraint*.

Where, then, would Christ's teaching come in, and how would it apply in life ? Why, just at this point of self-dependence. Take care whither you tend, and how fast you are going ! To-day, you are shrewd for your own advantage ; to-morrow, you may be shrewd

to your neighbour's hurt. To-day, you are simply frugal; to-morrow, you may be niggardly and mean. To-day, you are energetic and industrious; to-morrow, you may lick the feet of toil like an abject idolater. Is it possible, rightly and honestly, to depend upon ourselves, *without religion*? Christianity says, "No!" It denies that we can live thoughtless of God, and be unselfish. It denies that we can ignore the grandest portion of ourselves, and not be mean and low; suffer the world to make us distrustful of God, and not be sensual and proud. Have we gifts to trade with, a livelihood to gain, a nature to develop? "Consider," then, "the lilies how *they* grow," watched by God's eye, tended by His hand, smiled on by His love. Is not that Eye, that Hand, that Love, still more for us? Are not we much better than the flowers? Shall we, *men*, sink into our miserable insufficiency, and become the mere creatures of ourselves? Shall *we* wander out into the world, like a bewildered child escaping from its father's rule, and losing that father's tenderness; and when the wild, solitary, selfishness has worn us out, return beggars to that father's house, standing on the threshold of a slighted heaven, and too late knocking for admission?

That, indeed, is far from worthy of the name of self-dependence, which begins without God and ends without heaven. "*Soul*," the rich fool said, "thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine

ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Fool, indeed ! to speak to his *soul* as though it were his *body* ! To talk to *himself* as though he were that heap of dust soon to be hidden in the tomb ! "*Soul* !" Ah, would to God we did more often call that *soul* to colloquy ! *Soul* ! thou hast a standing but little lower than the angels ; thou hast pulses of eternity throbbing within thee ; thou hast features of thy God upon thy moral countenance ; awake thee to thy dignity and glory ! Live the life which thou art formed to live ! "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness ;" "lay up for thyself treasure in heaven : where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal ; for where thy treasure is, there shall thy heart be also."

Friends, let not this fact of self-dependence be contorted into falsehood. It is a lie, straight from the enemy of souls, that our Christianity is forced into a narrower compass because the work that wins our livelihood must needs be done. The hardest **work** amongst us may develope, *in that work*, nobler virtues, more Christian dispositions, and more heavenly desires, than the least burdened of his neighbours. Religion has no immediate, necessary, connection with leisure. It does not depend upon how much *time* we give to God ; but upon how much *heart* we give. And **why** is a Christian *less a Christian* with his thoughts directed to the earthly occupation, than with his *mind*

engaged upon the truths of Scripture, and the facts of Revelation? This is where the mistake is sometimes made. The Christianity of busy men is supposed to be, as a matter of course, *inferior in quality* to the Christianity of men of leisure. You hear it said that devotion to business is, *by its very nature*, temptation to the soul. But whose *spirit* is most exercised, whose moral features become most expressed, whose temper, dispositions, and substantial character, find most to draw them out? The busy man's, or those of the man of leisure? He is the best Christian, not who thinks most *often* or most *deeply* about Christian doctrines, not who spends most *time* in his devotions, not who finds it *easiest* to utter his experience or talk with God; but whose life, taken as a whole—private and public, at this time and at that, among earthly things, and among heavenly things—is most pervaded by the Christian spirit, and devoted to the Christian ends.

Therefore, every busy man deceives himself, and mocks his Maker, when he reasons against conscience, on the ground of lacking opportunity. If it were really the case, that gaining a livelihood necessitated inattention to the soul, Christianity would be intended only for the few, and the words of Scripture would be contradicted every day, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn *the world*, but that *the world* through Him might be saved." The busiest soul may be saved. The life of hardest struggle may be

consecrated to the praise of Christ. From this house of God every immortal being may go forth pledged to be wholly His ; keeping that pledge everywhere, and showing it, more or less distinctly, in everything.

“ Say, when in pity ye have gazed
On the wreathed smoke afar,
That o’er some town, like mist upraised,
Hung hiding sun and star,
Then, as ye turned your weary eye
To the green earth and open sky,
Were ye not fain to doubt how Faith could dwell,
Amid that dreary glare in this world’s citadel ?

There are, in this loud stemming tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime ;
Who carry music in their heart
Thro’ dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret soul a holy strain repeat.”

2. *Livelihood has to be obtained in a world crowded with temptations, and pervaded by ungodliness.* We must freely admit this, if we would understand the true position of the Christian man of business, and estimate his trials. Competition, for instance, in itself innocent enough while it is moderate and just, often degenerates into selfish scrambling, vile trickery, and

systematic fraud. Dealing with honourable men develops honourable feelings ; dealing with rogues taints and corrupts the soul. And there cannot be a doubt that when a Christian makes his transactions very numerous, has to do with multitudes of men, and attaches himself to the world by a great variety of interests, he opens sources of temptation otherwise completely shut, and he exposes a larger portion of his spiritual stronghold to assaults from besieging foes. Whether, in doing so, he is guilty of presumption, or is only seeking to be great *in order to be good*, is a question none can answer but himself and God. But the *danger* must be greater in itself.

How, then, does this fact of the world's unchristian state bear upon the subject now before us—the Christianity of busy men? No excuse is commoner for the lack of genuine religion, than the alleged necessity to do as the world does in order to success. Starting in life with no better resolve than to lay up treasure for ourselves, or to battle through the world as best we can, feeling will soon be blunted, principles will soon retire from the struggle—entanglements and moral perplexities will soon be cut in twain by the sharp edge of selfish interest ; and because we have so often followed bad example, we shall think no other road open to the same result. What men ought so say, if they would represent the case exactly *as it is*, is, not we are *compelled* to conform to the wrong, in order to

succeed ; but, we are *accustomed* to conform, and habit holds us fast. What necessity is there to keep pace with dishonest neighbours ? Let them travel at their own rate, and let them find their own company. Ask of God's Word, what is the mystery of their success ? "Surely, Thou didst set them in slippery places ; Thou castedst them down to destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment !" Who can doubt which life will be the happier and safer in the end ! That on the straight road of principle, or that on the crooked paths of selfishness ? You may think the unchristian competitor has got before you by his deviation from the rules of honour ; but what has he lost meanwhile ? He has been eating away his capital, he has been spending his moral character, and wasting his substantial worth ; and though his returns are quicker, and apparently more ample, he is making a bankrupt of himself for time and for eternity. The world may toss him his profits, but the world itself will scorn and hate him for his pains. He may heap to himself *gold*, and yet deprive that gold of half its value in the purchase of the *happiness* he seeks. Success ! what does it mean ? Gaining the ends of life. And is the end of life in the money chest ? Is there not such a thing as a *poor* rich man ? Three thousand years ago Solomon wrote, "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt." We may empty the world of

the happiness we want to buy, just as we fill our coffers with the gold with which we hope to buy it ; so that, at last, rich as we are in the means, there is a wilderness around us, and within us poverty of heart, poverty of soul, a beggared character, and a lonely, dreary, future ! But the world is not yet so thoroughly disordered that the Christianity of busy men need be the worst protector of their temporal affairs. Notwithstanding all temptations, goodness may persevere and reach the end. Beneath all those flimsy, superficial, principles prevalent around us in society, and to which the worldly man does homage, there are the deeper things of religion and morality which extend themselves wherever there are consciences to find them ; and a life which reaches down to *them*, rests itself upon *them*, and will be satisfied with nothing less, will be acknowledged, *even by the world*, the firmest and the best.

If there are multitudes of liars in the world, then, in God's name, let us take the Truth, and hold it forth in their very faces till they blush for shame. If the puffery is profitable, evidently passes off the injurious deception, what shall the Christian do ? Modify *his* method so as to admit some portion of the same untruthfulness ? God forbid ! No ! but, by that truth on which he rests, openly, bravely, published to the world, *make the lie profitless*. And, if there are inequalities which are impossible to remedy ; if the opportunities

which appear to flood one man's lot fall upon another's only drop by drop, or only in a narrow and uncertain stream ; if the disappointments seem to drive us to be lax, and the unusual difficulties seem to take our Christian principle by force and drag it to the snare ; if there are times when clouds so thick rest upon the way that our thoughts become confused, and our moral purposes are almost hidden out of sight ; then, let our Christianity be seen in this, that *God's necessity* holds us faster than the *world's*. *Circumstances* seem to say religious feeling *must* be sacrificed to gain a livelihood. He that speaks from out of heaven and eternity, replies, "Thou *shalt* love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." Then, the world's necessity shall prove itself a lie. God shall have our heart, and let Him do as He pleases with the rest. "A little that a righteous man hath is better" (yes, let the world say what it will, absolutely better) "than the riches of many wicked." "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in Him ; and He shall bring it to pass." "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

3. *Livelihood, my brethren, is more than we can gain.*
It includes that which the sweating brow, and the

toiling hand, and the anxious mind, are insufficient to obtain. We pace on in a certain round of common and familiar facts from day to day ; but could we take one step, could we secure one briefest span of progress, did not livelihood come to us as the gracious gift of God ? Peacefully we lay our heads upon the pillow, when the daily task is over ; peacefully we raise it from that pillow to resume our efforts. Who bathes and refreshes our weary limbs with slumber ? Who touches the secret spring lifting those closed eyelids ? Whose sceptre waived, bidding the shadows back into their caves—beckoning forth the sweet soft rays of morning light, rejoicing the earth and man ? Have we forgotten Him ? Are there any of our number thinking and labouring, without faith in God ? Oh, it is a melancholy blindness ! Shrewdness, tact, energy, plannings and workings, what are they all worth, if they coincide not with the purposes of God ? A helm there is to the vessel. God holds it. Undercurrents, mysterious undercurrents of events,—human eyes may fail to trace them till they bear us whither we had least expected. A sun there is ripening earth's produce by his rays, setting in motion the activity of commerce and the fertility of enterprise ; but not asking us whether the harvest which he perfects shall be early or late, bountiful or scanty. There are human passions which by some sudden blast may be lashed into fury, and the awful storm of war may

sweep swiftly over the nations of the earth, laying many a fair prospect, and dashing to fragments n a noble freight of human hopes. Oh! let us ourselves dependent on a wise and holy God. L believe that "the life is more than meat, and body more than raiment." The time will c when the meat will no longer nourish life, when body will no longer call for raiment. The vesti will be passed. On the threshold of another worl must lay aside the forms and shows of earth, prepare for the grand realities then to be reve Ah, then, how blessed will it be to feel that thr the businesses of time we have set affection on glories of eternity! The frail mechanism of mort shakes and trembles; friendly faces, gathered r our bed, watch the few last pulsations of the with frame; one by one the minutes are told out, the stroke of the pendulum counting them off with s solemn, regularity; death's cold hand is closing a tighter grasp upon the fluttering heart; but the of God stands at the entrance to a glorious immort bidding a calm adieu to all the weakness he passed, and looking on with cheerful hope into better life, "hidden with Christ in God," "mani in all its blessedness, "at His appearing."

Let me not conclude without appealing to all, my friends, clearly to foresee that trying l Attempt not to hide from present businesses

present joys, the solemn light which falls upon them from an overarching, limitless, eternity!

Some have travelled little way along the line of their earthly course; found, as yet, but few of their griefs and conflicts; know but little of the snares through which they have to pass. Determine to be busy, dear young friends. Keep within you a resolute heart, a brave purpose, and a manly, noble, ambition! Fear not that industry and honesty will purchase their reward; but clothe yourselves with Christianity, both as your strong defence and as your beautiful adornment. Then you will be proof against the sharpest arrows of temptation, and your life will be a blessed and an honourable thing, though it be spent in the humblest cottage, and affords the scantiest fare.

Are we midway on the journey? Is the press and strain full upon our energies? Are we doing as much, and thinking as much, as we ever can expect to do and think during the present state? Let us again inquire, both of ourselves and of the world,—Am I as Christian as I, one day, shall look back and wish that I had been? Am I busy for my soul, and for my Saviour? Am I building up the fortune of an heir of immortality and God?

Livelihood sustains us for the tomb; and there are some standing on its verge! A few swift years are all that they anticipate on earth. The sand is falling in a narrow stream, and the last few grains will soon be out.

Oh! how precious is that Christianity which teaches us how *to live* when the steps begin to falter, when cup of earthly pleasures trembles in our hand. Let its holy comforts to your heart. Let it encircle hoary head with a wreath of glorious hope! Then you calmly say, "I am always confident, for I live by faith, not by sight."





CONSCIENCE IN BUSY LIFE.*

"FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH SALVATION HATH APPEARED TO ALL MEN, TEACHING US THAT, DENYING UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS, WE SHOULD LIVE SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY, AND GODLY, IN THIS PRESENT WORLD; LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, AND THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST; WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM ALL INIQUITY, AND PURIFY UNTO HIMSELF A PECULIAR PEOPLE, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS."—Titus ii, 11-14.

AN active life carries a man through a great variety of scenes; places him in many different situations. Constantly doing something, his energies kept perpetually awake, his character will soon be formed, and will shape itself very distinctly. It cannot, indeed, be concluded that because he is busy, he is not narrow-minded—because he exerts himself much, therefore, his growth is healthy. But, at least, his moral character will be decided. Mingling much

* Addressed to Men of Business.

with fellow-men, we shall find ourselves, almost every moment of the day, brought into circumstances which demand a moral feeling, and which either make us worse than we are or make us better, just as we choose to meet them.

Suppose our occupation is, for the most part similar from day to day ; nearly the same kind of exertion has to be made, nearly the same faculties brought into play, and nearly the same circumstances are surrounding us meanwhile. Then, how firmly habits will be formed ! How certainly the constant line of work will lead our moral self, our mind and heart, in one decided, unmistakeable direction ! An advantage can be taken on the side of selfishness ; it can be taken to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, and the habit becomes fixed. We are carrying on the same transaction, under different forms, with one man now, and with another man to-morrow. If there is only a tinge of dishonesty in that transaction, it will not injure each of those neighbours greatly ; but what an accumulation of badness in ourselves ! The water drops slowly on the rock ; it produces no perceptible effect on that which only receives the single drop ; but it wears away, with fatal certainty, the place constantly exposed to it. Always going through the same round of duties, the doing of them well or ill becomes a fact of the character, fixed moral character ; not a mere accident.

or passing expression of the man. What he is in that familiar path, he will show himself elsewhere. If he is a good man, with his pen or his tool in hand, at his daily task, his goodness is decided and sincere ; if the selfishness, the worldliness, the insincerity, stick to his actions through that larger portion of his time, he will not shake them off when shutters are put up, and ledgers are laid aside, and another sphere of life engages him.

Or, suppose again, that our activity is very varied. One day, we are doing one kind of thing ; the next, quite another ; now, we are thinking hard about complicated facts and arrangements ; to-morrow, we are simply toiling with material objects in a beaten path ; at another time, we are wholly engaged in immediate transactions with fellow-creatures. How inevitably through all that change the qualities of soul will be called out ! Again and again cases will arise in which the right way of acting and the wrong way of acting will, so to speak, dispute possession of the man ; he will be obliged to judge between them and to lend his will either to the one or to the other. The busier he is, the larger his undertakings and relations with mankind, the oftener he will meet with knots and entanglements, only to be rightly untwisted by the conscientious mind and the true heart ; and the more frequent will be the temptation rashly and impatiently to cut them through with wrong principles and feelings.

His being busy is nothing to his detriment ; but if determines to be always doing, let him look well to the method and the spirit of his life, for the more he does unworthily the more unworthy is he in himself. The more extended his probation, the larger and more solemn his responsibility.

The subject of *Conscience* is, therefore, one of the greatest practical importance, and demands our best attention, in these times of unusual activity and multiplied temptations. The aim of Christian teachers in their efforts to extend a Christian influence on society in general, and regulate as much as possible the businesses of life, will naturally be to give enlightenment to the Conscience, and insist upon its rights. What *ought* to be, must not be left to be decided in the courts of mere expediency and worldly competition. We must proclaim the *Christian laws* as the only sufferable standard for mankind to judge by, and the spirit of those laws we must do our best to propagate in all directions. And a great thing it is just clear to hold forth the light, whether individual men receive it or refuse it. It is not to be expected that the world shall all at once take up the work of reformation, or that, apart from a vast spiritual change, any thorough restoration of the habits and usages of life should be effected. But the bold and constant proclamation of the right is a preparation for the overthrow of wrong.

1 We may quicken men's sense of shame, and drive the
 2 false, unchristian, practices to hide themselves in
 3 corners, or to clothe themselves with pretexts and
 4 disguises, and when once such palpable distinction
 5 has been drawn no small portion of the work has been
 6 accomplished. At present, there is too much reason
 7 to fear that the *ought* of the pulpit is not the *ought* of
 8 the warehouse or exchange, and that spiritual principles
 9 acknowledged on the Sabbath are denied their applica-
 10 tion in the week. Has not one cause of this, hitherto,
 11 been in the too great generality of religious teaching?
 12 Must not the facts of life, of business life, life in the
 13 world's highway, be oftener brought to recollection in
 14 the place where God is more especially acknowledged,
 15 and where the soul is consciously beneath His eye?
 16 What men need to see is the truth and unspeakable
 17 momentousness of what is spoken in the name of God.
 18 Let them see it, then, clothed in familiar garb among
 19 their everyday experience. Open their eyes to see the
 20 doctrines of the Gospel, lighting up that busy world
 21 in which they live and act, convicting the false,
 22 exposing to view the spiritual snares, and revealing the
 23 possibility of goodness.

The passage of God's Word which is the text of
 this discourse, contains all the substance of Christian
 doctrine on the subject of Conscience. It teaches us
 what are the marks of a conscientious life, and it

teaches us, likewise, what religion has to do with such a life—how the *being* what we *ought to be*, and the *doing* what we *ought to do*, are closely linked together and the only kind of Conscience safe to follow is the Conscience purified by Christianity, quickened by God's Grace, and maintained by living intercourse with Jesus Christ.

1. Now, the first question which the text suggests and answers, is the following,—How is Conscience affected by the Gospel? And this being a vital question, let us weigh well the doctrine which is taught us. Here we are plainly told that "*the Grace of God thus bringeth Salvation*" teaches us what kind of life we are to live in this present world. There are few, perhaps, who would openly deny that declaration; but there is a great need to insist upon it firmly. The notions which prevail so largely in the world upon the subject of morality, seem to be directly contradictory of such a statement. "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Here, the practical religion of the life is made dependent on the spiritual feelings and the Christian faith. We must be looking for Christ; the soul must be alive to His approaching glory. In other words, Christianity must lift us out of ourselves, giv-

us another aim, imbue us with another spirit, and send us forth upon another errand.

Now, this renovation of the life, through a deep laid spiritual change, is a great puzzle to the unenlightened, and at times a stumbling-block over which they fall. Every man has a conscience. In the great majority of cases, perhaps, a conscience not silent, but pronouncing its judgments clearly enough as to the broad distinctions between right and wrong. Honesty, integrity, benevolence, moderation—are not they religion? “If I follow my conscience, and to the best of my ability fulfil my duties to my neighbour, where is the distinction,” says the moral man, making no profession of religion, “between my goodness and the goodness of another?” Just in that fact, that your conscience might be Christian, and it is no more than moral. We should judge a heathen simply by the heathen’s standard. If he has no law but that which God has written in his nature, by that law alone he will be judged. But “the Grace of God that bringeth Salvation hath appeared,” to supersede that lower law, absorbing it in that of Christianity. The world lays down its rules of conduct. These rules, though not, generally speaking, contradictory of Christian truth, are still defective in their tendency; they are founded, for the most part, on the principles of social order and expediency; they contemplate nothing but the temporary interests and present relationships of men;

not their spiritual nature and eternal destiny. We cannot expect the world, while its regeneration is imperfect, to be governed universally by spiritual truths; but let the distinction be kept clear. Acting up to the world's standard of right is one thing, being right is another. You will see this distinction better by considering a case in illustration. Business transactions may be perfectly fair and upright, judged by business rules; but still immoral, judged by Christian principle. Because, according to Christianity's teaching, the individual act is good or bad, as it belongs to character and bespeaks the man himself, not merely as a single act, measured by a formal standard. There may be nothing wrong in a certain transaction, considered simply in itself; but a Christian may be quite unable, still, to reconcile it with *his* conscience. Have I a right, for example, with the teaching of the Saviour in remembrance, to ignore the feelings of my fellow-man, and treat him simply as a fortunate contrivance in the social machine, by which my interests shall be promoted? The world's principle is, every man for himself. Interests must be balanced one against the other, and he that cannot stand must fall. But the Grace of God teaches a better rule, "Ye, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please yourselves." "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." If there are neighbours lying in the way,

wounded and half dead, no doubt the priest and Levite justify their passing on the other side by some sort of plausible reasonings ; but the loving heart will break through all pretence and prejudice, and hasten with relief. Surely, nothing can excuse neglect where suffering and danger are concerned. If the cheap market ruins thousands of my fellow-creatures, what right have I to buy there ? If the bargain, though an open one, gives me profit to my neighbour's injury, how can it be just ? If the circumstances which enable one man to demand what another can supply, put him above that other in his influence and power, then he is responsible, not alone for what his inferior actually claims, but for what that inferior needs and asks, *by his position*. A master may demand of his servant no more than what that servant has engaged to do ; but that engagement may be forced upon the servant by his dependent circumstances and his want, while the better position of the master gives him undoubted opportunities easily to forego his claim without an injury to his own interests.

Many other illustrations will suggest themselves, proving that distinction must be made between rules of worldly justice and injunctions of the Christian conscience. Instances occur in every active man's career, in which he cannot be less than a Christian without condemning himself. "Fair," "upright," "honest," he may claim these titles by obedience to

the ordinary regulations of mankind ; still his conduct may be grossly defective in the sight of God, expressing nothing of compassion for his neighbour's wants, and wilfully ignoring claims upon his sympathy, benevolence, and help. We cannot lay aside any portion of our nature when we take up common businesses and engage ourselves in work among the world's great crowd. Whether we remember it or not, the fact remains unaltered, we are spiritual beings, responsible for feelings as well as for deeds, for motives as well as for consequences, for the ends we aim at as well as for the means we employ, in every individual transaction of our life. God has not said, thou shalt, as the standard of thy duty, balance thy interest against thy neighbour's, thou shalt load him with no burdens, rob him of no rights ; but, thou shalt *love* him as thyself, thy heart shall be engaged in his behalf, and in all thy dealings with him thou shalt act, not as a cold machine calculating for thyself, but as a living friend expressing heavenly benevolence. No man *loves* his neighbour if he listens to no other voice than that of interest and policy, and gives his conscience to the world to be adjusted to its selfish principles. A Christian heart must be in us, a love kindled by the altar flames of Christ's great sacrifice, a spirit breathed within us by the Father of all mercies. Then, we shall make our life a blessing to our fellow-men and a holy offering to God, however much we spend it in the highways of

commercial intercourse, and in the press of eager competition.

Let us firmly hold the doctrine of the text, that the true morality is identical with the true religion. Godliness is the only goodness recognised by Christianity. And what is godliness? Not a character which we assume one day and lay down another; but a quality distinguishing the very substance of our self, inseparable from us, at every time and in every place. He is not a godly man who chooses an aim in life apart from all consideration of his Maker, who is busy all the hours of the day without a thought of how he shall fulfil the service of his God, and what he ought to be, standing in view of heaven. He is not a godly man who is contented with the approbation of the world, and revels in the prospect of a temporal prosperity, shutting his ears to voices from his deeper nature, and closing his eyes to dangers threatening his soul. However moral he may seem, however good he may be called, let his want of godliness, his want of heartfelt devotion to his Maker, be acknowledged as his condemnation. We must not be afraid to denounce ungodly principles. If we find our fellow-men transacting their affairs in a selfish spirit, with no Christian ends, with the sordid motives of mere worshippers of wealth, trampling on interests which God commands them to respect, promoting wrongs crying to heaven for retribution, neglecting efforts of benevolence plainly enjoined by

their life's advantages, boldly let us call them to account, and faithfully let us warn our generation of the danger which their example must involve. Society will never be preserved from immoralities until we all thoroughly believe that morality and godliness are one, and that nothing which comes short of Christ's own standard can be right and fitting to be done.

2. Another question is suggested by the text. How does Christianity support and defend the Conscience in the actual dangers of this present world? For it would place the Christian under special disadvantage to enlighten him above his neighbours on the subject of his duty, and command him to a purer conduct, while the subtleties of sin and the fierce attacks of temptation threatened him as greatly as before. Numbers shift away the truths of Christ from their own path, because they think them hindrances too great to be surmounted in their course. To keep a Christian conscience seems, to them, to forfeit prospects of success. Unless they compromise the matter with the world, unless they bring their principles into agreement with the usages of most around them, not being over delicate and scrupulous, or too religious, for this weekday life, human energy will be too weak to fight against these difficulties, and the rushing multitude will trample them beneath their feet!

Let us, then, clearly understand, once more, what

the position of the Christian really is ; what he has to rest upon ; and how, through all temptations, *it is possible* to him, not alone to have, but to keep, " a conscience void of offence," both towards his Maker and his fellows. Christianity preserves the conscience thus,—it explains the world ; it purifies the heart ; it fortifies the will.

When the Apostle Paul would stimulate his Christian brethren to faithfulness and steadfastness amongst temptations, he reminds them that " the fashion of this present world is passing away ;" another and a higher state of things is approaching. " This, I say, brethren, the time is short. I would have you without carefulness, using this world without abusing it." And in the text we are commanded to " deny ungodliness and worldly lusts ; live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ; *looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ;*" regarding everything of earth in the light of that glorious future !

What, then, must the Christian man of business grasp the implements with which he toils less firmly than his neighbours ? Does his Christianity command him to be sluggish and indifferent, except about another world than this, and let his energies be rocked to slumber in the arms of his spiritual expectation ? Giving directions to servants, the Apostle says, " Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not

unto men." We are not allowed "to be slothful in business," but enjoined to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." But, does it not change abundantly the method of our life, to watch at every post where God may place us for the coming of the Saviour; not, indeed, with vacant stare into the heavens, but with diligent consideration of the signs upon the earth? What power there is in the *ought* of Christian principles, if these principles are working out a final triumph for themselves, and are bringing in "an everlasting kingdom!" Do we not hear disputes, fierce wrangling and contentions in the world, as to the laws men are to follow? One man's justice is another's wrong; one man's panacea for the miseries and imperfections of society, is another's constant horror! But the revelations of the Gospel throw abundant light upon the practical confusions of mankind. We know that nothing shall remain but that which harmonises with the truth of Christ. We condemn whatever Christianity is superseding and destroying. We acknowledge no other necessity but that which shall be justified when Jesus shall reveal His perfect glory. Do we not need such faith to be the guardian of our conscience?

Suppose a practice common in the world, appears to us condemnable on conscientious grounds. We begin to reason about it. We ask where lies the badness—why it appears so wrong? We find it hard to say. It

injures some; but it injures them only a little, and very briefly. It tends to promote confusion in society's arrangements; but what are they worth, after all, and why should the individual consider them rather than himself? It revolts the moral instinct; but it gratifies the instinct of self-interest; which is the more important? When such thoughts take possession of men's minds, and they often do, what can sweep them out, but the simplicity of Christian faith? The world has been redeemed by Jesus. He is "purifying to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Away, then, with excuses for injustice! If the doubtful practice will not find place in a Christian world, the Christian dare not give it countenance. Reasonings are vain against the dictate of his faith. He is pledged to a better state of things; he "declares plainly that he seeks a country, a better country, that is a heavenly;" therefore, in the imperfections and confusions of a sinful world, his trust shall never fix itself. Like his Master, whom he follows, for this cause, and "to this end, has he been sent," amongst mankind, that "he might bear witness to the truth."

Do we talk, then, of Christianity to busy men? Why, it is their talisman and guide! It quickens their conscience, so that it lights them, with unfailing certainty, through mazy paths and dark entanglements of earthly circumstance. What they ought to do, and what they ought to be,—they hear it from a Saviour's

throne ; they see it in their glimpses of the future they are taught on earth to have "their conversation in heaven," and "live soberly, righteously, and godly," "looking for that blessed hope," which shall at last reward their zeal and steadfastness for Christ.

2. Again, Christianity *purifies the heart*, and a pure heart preserves the conscience. It is quite impossible to say where a man will stop, if he begins without religious feeling, and is guided by the mere leading of circumstances. To-day, he may act fairly and honestly enough ; but, to-morrow, complications baffle his judgment, delude his reason, he loses hold of moral principle, and lets it altogether go in the confusion. Have we not instances in mind, showing us how possible it is, when once the foot is set upon the byepath of unchristian conduct, to be more and more seduced into a wilderness of wrong until the soul is thoroughly abandoned to its guilt ? No man sets out in life without a conscience. What becomes of it, when he is thoroughly absorbed in worldly occupation, beset, as he often is, on every side, with allurements to be selfish and unjust ? Can he trust the strength of resolution ? Is it enough to take a firm determination with himself, that, come what will, stand where he may, never will he lend his energies to sin ? Go forbid that any of us should rest on such a shadow. "It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy

God." He who casts himself down into a sinful world's dangers, trusting to preserve his moral character unimpaired, by some virtue in himself, or by some miracle wrought on his behalf, tempts God to leave him to his miserable weakness, and destroy him in his vain presumption. How can we know what difficulties are appointed us, to what unusual trials changes in our lot may put us? A quick mind and a firm resolve serve us but little, if the deeper feelings of the heart have not been purified by Him who gave Himself for us that He *might* redeem us from all iniquity. "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," requires something more than prudence and determination. Our *heart* must deny them. They must lose their hold upon desire and affection. Their power to attract and to excite must be destroyed, in whatever form they clothe themselves. Then, how blessed is the help of Christian faith! We can deny what Christ has taught us to deny, with hearts pledged to be His and full of sympathy with His great purposes. We desire not riches that shall rob us of our cherished love; prosperity that shall ruin us for Christian service; gains that shall lose us heaven. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise," on these things

will our hearts be set, and the "Grace of God," the contentment of divine sufficiency—that which passeth all reckoning of the world—"shall keep us through Christ Jesus."

Once more, Christianity *fortifies the will*. It gives us holy bravery and resolution. It sustains the judgment of our conscience and our heart, with moral energy and fearlessness. What we call strength of character is especially promoted by religion. Yielding up the soul to Christian truth throws new vigour into all the personal convictions, whether directly spiritual or not. Hence, we find amongst the humblest, most retiring, and apparently most feeble, in the flock of Christ, oftentimes a wisdom, and decision, and loftiness of mind which bespeak, at once, the elevating influence of true religion. Soldiers are said to catch the spirit of their leaders. A great commander feels almost equal confidence in his army with that which he feels in his own powers, because he knows his influence is almost omnipotent to nerve them to effort and sustain them in dangers. In like manner, Christians find their weakness fortified, looking to Jesus and confiding in His presence. 'The Spirit of all might takes possession of their souls. Because they do not their own will, but the will of their Saviour who has bought them, their judgment is preserved just, and they are strengthened from above, "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Oh! there is nothing but

the heroism of the saint which stands unshaken through the multitude of worldly contradictions, rooting itself the firmer, like the oak, for all the storms and wintry blasts that threaten its destruction. Many a fighter is heroic with the sword of steel, and on the battle-field of human passions; but the courage to be conscientious, spite of all mocks and taunts, even to the point of self-humiliation, "resisting unto blood," in opposition to the wrong—*that* demands a Christian faith and a Christian humility.

He that feels himself decided to be Christ's disciple, who can lay his hand upon his heart, and say, "One thing I know, that whereas I rested on myself, now I am trusting in the Saviour; whereas I walked in my own heart's devices, now I am willing to be led," goes forth into the world, having "put on the whole armour of God," and being "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might!" Are there fiery darts? The shield of faith is able to quench them. Are there slippery places and untoward ruggednesses in his path? His "feet are shod," already, "with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace." Is the strife wearisome, do the powers of his nature faint? He is "girt about with truth," and upheld with encircling righteousness. Has he enemies within him and without; dispositions, habits, thoughts; examples, and opinions, in his fellow-men; difficulties of his lot, falsehoods of the world; all fiercely striking at his "helmet of salvation?"

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication, and watching thereunto,” with perseverance and humility he wields the two-edged “sword of the Spirit,” utterl disperses all his foes, and wins that “crown of righteousness laid up henceforth,” which, when the fight is fought, the course finished, and the faith kept to the end, “the Lord, the righteous Judge,” shall place upon his head.

Let us, then, be busy, with a Christian conscience for our guide; afraid of life without decision for the Saviour. God give us those deep convictions, and those fervent feelings, which the Spirit of His Love can quicken in the soul, so that, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” we may “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”





BROTHERHOOD.*

"WHOSOEVER DOETH NOT RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT OF
GOD, NEITHER HE THAT LOVETH NOT HIS BROTHER."

1 John, iii., 10.

IT is the same with the world of men as with the world of things. All are related to each other. They could not subsist, as a world, unless those relationships were preserved. And it must be admitted, that men of business have special opportunities of seeing and of understanding this fact of mutual dependence and social union. Their numerous transactions, their multitudinous dealings, bring them into contact with a great variety of fellow-men, all of whom by this means become manifestly their brethren, holding a positive and evident relationship with them. They are reminded, every hour, that others need their services, and that they need the services of others. Free interchange of benefit is the law of progress and prosperity ; all uniting to produce as best they can, and all agreeing to distribute just as the merits of

* Addressed to Men of Business.

each shall claim. The common maxims passed from mouth to mouth, in the busy world, take for granted the dependence of mankind on one another, and their universal brotherhood.

None would attempt to deny that, in order to obtain speedy and large success in almost any pursuit, the busy man is tempted, sorely and continually tempted, to indulge a selfish spirit, to follow selfish rules, to imitate conspicuously selfish men. Although linked with others in his activities more closely every day, he may withdraw from them, more and more, his benevolent sympathies. Notwithstanding that he has so much to do with his brother-man, his heart may grow colder towards him, his dealings with him more mechanical, until, at last, he makes himself, in his own thought and feeling, the whole world's centre. However hard he toils, and however anxiously he watches, the one purpose and sole motive of it all, is this,—that large returns of profit and enjoyment may flow back upon himself.

The wrongs men do to one another, in hunting after riches, are, indeed, beyond all language to describe. The hard-heartedness, the almost diabolical indifference, characterising a great deal of what is currently received as honest dealing, the thrusting aside of weary sufferers crying for help, the loading with additional burdens those already groaning beneath the weight of poverty or sickness, the kicking away

the prop, by some sinister movement, from under an unstable competitor, the beating a man with his own crutches, the throwing out possible ruin upon hundreds for the sake of a chance fall of fortune to ourselves! Such things are too common to be doubted, or to need particular illustration. The rash speculation, the helter-skelter traffic, the unsound dealings, prevailing to so large an extent throughout society, bring conspicuously to view a wide-spread selfishness, and a sad lack of brotherly consideration, sympathy, and purpose.

Such evils have been long deplored. Thoughtful observers have again and again dragged to light their darkest forms. A great many books have appeared, protesting against the worst of our social abuses, calling for a heartier co-operation for their removal, and inculcating the spirit of brotherhood as the sovereign remedy.

Before proceeding further, let me call to your recollection what is, in fact, the substance of all that has been said, from any other than Christian sources, in respect to this great want of the world,—*true brotherhood*. Is it not just this,—that while the business and the burdens of this present life continue, it is necessary to co-operate as partners in order to be happy, in order to help each other to a larger share of gain than isolated efforts would be able to secure? What is often called "*brotherhood*," is nothing more than

"partnership," for worldly ends ; association, not of sympathy and of affection, but simply of craft and labour. During the commotion in society, at the close of the last century, a great cry was raised against the common distinctions of rank and station. An attempt was made to bring all classes to one uniform level ; professedly, in order to diffuse the spirit of *"fraternity."* That was the watchword on the lips of men who worshipped Reason as their goddess ; banished all religion, all spiritual service, from their model society ; and would place no other object for attainment in the front of life, than temporal prosperity ! The consequence was that, while *"fraternity"* was inscribed on their banners, they butchered their fellow-creatures in the spirit of demons, rather than of men ; they formed themselves into a league to rob others of that freedom which they swore themselves to propagate. Since those times, something like the same contradiction has been witnessed in the world's ideas. Again and again, voices have been heard, calling for more *"co-operation ;"* crying out against the looseness of social ties, and the wrongs of selfish competition ; now, with revolutionary tumult ; and, now with more peaceful reasonings. But the meaning of such efforts after brotherhood seems to be merely this,—to bring mankind into closer fellowship, for the sake of present happiness. And that is exactly the reason of their failure. The aim has been worldly and

low, while the principles have professed to be lofty. The arguments have been founded on the constitution of human nature, and, yet, that constitution has been belied. The light of Christianity has not been recognised, and a human being has been regarded as no more than a perishable creature of the earth.

We need not condemn all the kindly-meant attempts which are made to carry into practice theories of socialistic co-operation. They are not entirely useless. In some instances they have effected great good. But the Christian minister, preaching Christianity as the universal remedy for the disorders of the world, cannot but lift up his protest against what he knows to be radical error. Mere artificial association must not be put in the place of that which is higher. Let the world be its own judge. Let the world's methods be acknowledged distinct from those of Christianity, so long as they are not founded on distinctly Christian principles. A great deal might be said, no doubt, against the principle of competition. It is not a Christian principle. It is often acted upon in a very unchristian manner. But we must be careful how we admit the superiority of another principle just as little taken from Christianity. That is no remedy at all for the miseries of competition which does away with its advantages, namely, freedom from monopoly, development of individual energy and talent, and the multiplication of the general resources of mankind,

while it substitutes very little in their place. If you interfere with the world's arrangements, without making that world essentially better, more unworldly in its principles and spirit, you increase its confusions, without the prospect of removing them, and you darken its sorrows with a deeper shade of gloom. Co-operation, as against competition, must be a failure, while true brotherhood is not the ruling principle in society. Apart from Christianity, mending matters among busy men looks a hopeless task. Therefore, Christian ministers should do their best to make known how clearly, sufficiently, and consistently the brotherhood of men may be viewed in the light of Bible teaching, and by the help of Gospel principles.

"Whosoever doeth not righteousness," says the Apostle John, in the text, "is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." Two marks of the children of God are here set before us, both equally conspicuous and equally trustworthy; and, in fact, identical in their real nature,—"*doing righteousness*," "*loving our brother*." A great deal is often said about *rights*. One who respects his neighbour's *rights*, is the world's idea of a good and upright man. "*Doing righteousness*," I dare say, many would define, "*giving to every man his due; paying debts; keeping clear of illegalities; in short, doing no wrongs;*" but, as though this negative interpretation had already been

anticipated by the sacred writer, he repeats the same rule, under another form,—“*neither he that loveth not his brother.*” That is not righteousness in God’s esteem, whatever men may think it, which is simply passive. We may do no wrong to our brother without loving him ; we may do no wrong to him simply because we love ourselves, and avoid the punishment of wrong. But the teaching is plain enough, *doing right* is identical with *loving our brother*. Whatever is selfish, is unrighteous ; whatever is cold-hearted, is unrighteous ; whatever is unbenevolent and mean, is unrighteous. While we withdraw anything of gentleness and kind consideration from our fellow-man, for the purpose of more intently regarding ourselves, we do him an injury, and commit a transgression against God. This is the great doctrine of the Gospel,—that righteousness is always love, and love is always righteousness. God *cannot* express love without righteousness. If God loves a creature, it must be, not blind partiality, but righteousness. Sinners *cannot* live in divine love, except as they are clothed in divine righteousness through the blessed sacrifice of Jesus. What a different world, then, is man’s world from God’s ! God’s world is constituted according to the laws of love. Man’s world is a company of beings, seeking to have as little as possible to do with one another, except for purposes of individual enjoyment and subsistence. God’s righteousness is His


benevolence ; man's righteousness is his self-protection. Now, this unchristian separation between righteousness and love, lies at the root of many of those social wrongs and miseries which we all deplore, and for the banishment of which the remedies proposed by worldly men prove themselves so utterly inadequate. Is it a rare thing for rules to be followed in business, which produce sad and cruel results, and for the same men who follow those rules as closely as any, to think themselves benevolent because they put their names to a charity subscription list, and devote a portion of their gains to alleviate the sorrows of humanity? They help to strike down the weak by their unmerciful dealings, and then subscribe for balm to pour into their wounds! Are there not multitudes ruined, body and soul, in the fierce conflict which is waged, from day to day, in the crowded places of the world? Has it not come to this,—that the scramble after gold is so selfish and so violent, that none but the iron-made, the physical giants, gain the prizes; the weak, not only may, but must, go to the wall? Why should we blame the principle of competition? That is not sufficient to explain such facts. Men might compete, freely and earnestly, with one another, while at the same time full of sympathy and true benevolence, which should make them not mutual destroyers, but considerate co-workers. When, for example, superior natural advantages give to the busy man speedy and

comparatively easy success, while the world dare not dispute his right to take as large a portion as he can of himself; surely, the laws of Christianity dictate another course. His superior advantages ought to be used for his fellow-creatures' benefit, as well as for his own. That is not righteousness, which ignores the inequalities existing in the world; which treats all as though they started from the same point, and so disguises the actual state of things, to suit individual purposes.

Again, the principle is often boldly stated, among busy men, that an advantage is righteously ours which our neighbour concedes unwittingly, in his ignorance, or through some natural defect; that we are not bound to place ourselves in his position, to make allowances for that which he lacks, and to refuse to make to ourselves a gain which he would certainly demand, and rightly demand, but for some deficiency which keeps him silent. What says the Word of God? "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." The rules of the world say,—a man is not obliged to think for his neighbour; let every wit sharpen itself on its own whetstone; let every runner in the race look to his own feet. The doctrine of the Bible is, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Trade has a higher end than mere personal gain. When we profess to supply our

fellow-creatures' wants, we profess to consider ~~those~~ wants, in order to supply them ; not simply to reward ourselves. When a servant makes his engagement with a master, whatever verbal stipulations may be formally laid down, it is always implicitly, if not expressly, understood, that the service is *heartily* rendered ; that the bond is one of mutual consideration ; not of mere mechanical action. The standard of the right, on both sides, is the standard of benevolence and brotherhood. We can all see the truth of this, in such an instance as the relation between master and servant ; why is it less evident, in all the vast variety of dealings men carry on with each other ? The relation, in every case, is substantially the same. Some things are openly announced ; others are tacitly implied. Righteousness is done when, to the best of our ability and opportunity, each helps the other to be happy.

What has recently occurred in our own country, has opened, indeed, a terrible glimpse into the depths of unrighteousness and fraud in the social state ; depths which are often covered over, for a time, by the plausible appearances of selfish cleverness. We shudder to think of the cruel consequences of deception, in instances so gross and palpable. We are ready to denounce all such unrighteous practices. None of us has a word to say in their defence. Whoever tells a lie, in the article he sells, or the transaction he effects, excludes himself from all honest men's



society, and brands himself with the thief's mark, just as certainly—would that it were just as plainly to the world—as the felon convicted at the bar of justice. Ought not such cases to remind us, at the same time, that there is an unrighteousness, not so readily condemned, even sanctioned, by what are called the *usages* of honest business, which is traced by the eye of God, however it eludes the eye of men. Whenever we withhold from our neighbour an advantage we might certainly give him, without distinct injury to ourselves, we commit an act, I will not say, equally heinous in its character with deliberate fraud, but assuredly partaking of the same selfishness and disregard to the interests of others, irreconcilable with the Christian spirit of benevolence.

Let us be sure of this,—the principles and customs of society will never cease to be tinged with dishonesty, until the doctrine of the text is universally acknowledged and received,—that the righteous deed is the generous deed ; that the just is always the kind ; that every rule and every habit proceeding from another motive than the Christian one of “doing unto others as we would that they should do unto us,” is dictated by the same father of lies whose works are works of darkness, and whose end is the destruction of men's souls and the ruin of the world. “Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

It would be possible, my brethren, to bring together many illustrations, from the scenes and facts of every day, which might serve to enforce these great truths upon our minds, showing us how full the world is of wrongs, because it is so far from full of love. These, however, I must leave to be supplied by your own recollection. My chief object, in this address, is to speak, not so much of men as they are, as of men as Christianity would make them. It is the necessity of godliness, that I would urge. It is the impossibility of any true brotherhood without Christ, and his religion which seems, to me, the most important conclusion to be drawn. Many, no doubt, are ready to say, that the principles of pure benevolence are certainly the only righteous principles ; but who can follow them, and keep them to the end ? Are we not obliged to be selfish ? Does not life plunge us in a thick, fierce battle, where the very instincts of our nature, or necessary self-defence, compel us to strike out, and often, in our blindness, to destroy or wound the happiness of others ? Let us consider, then, the influence of Christianity, in this respect of brotherhood, how it rescues us from selfishness, and how it fits us for this truly righteous life.

It may sound almost like paradox, but the more we dwell upon it, the truer we shall feel it to be, that the *less* we make of this world, the *more* we may have of it. Short-sighted men, understanding nothing

mystery of godliness, scoff at religion as a thing
 unfits man for the present state ; but the
 tures have declared that "godliness hath the
 ise of the life that now is, as well as of that
 is to come." "The children of this world are
in their generation;" but they are not wise *for*
 generation. They do, without religion, a great
 that many Christians foolishly omit to do ; but
 as often injure one another's happiness, simply by
 worldliness. Now, the Gospel gives this real
 stage, in living and working together, that it
 es us to treat one another as immortal beings,
 g an eternal destiny, a soul of incalculable
 . It teaches us, therefore, to esteem all our
 v-men as worthy of our highest consideration.

hard, very hard indeed, to treat my fellow-
 ure as I ought, while I feel no love for his soul.
 rding him in the light of mere worldly interests,
 ems a trifling thing to neglect him ; to do him a
 g ; to make him an instrument of selfish gain.

sharer only in the joys of earth, what can it
 r, after all, says the careless heart, whether he or
 ve the larger portion ? Differences must exist ;
 rave will soon end them all. Is it not in some
 way that the rich justify to themselves neglect of
 poor, and the powerful trample on the weak ?
 e world," they say, "is not of our making ; we
 ot help the wrongs ; let them remain as they are.

At all events, they cannot last for ever." Christia sheds the light of immortality over the things of e There is nothing in this world—businesses, relat ships, enjoyments, all that other men are to us, all that we are to them, but whose influence wil extended through the ages of eternity. What! a placed among a crowd of fellow-travellers, all a journeying to God's judgment throne, and can I t it a matter trivial and unimportant, whether I do t good or do them ill ; help them or hinder them ; s them my love, or show them my indifference ?

Those are remarkable words employed by Saviour, when a tempting lawyer asked him to exp " which is *the great* commandment of the law ? " replied, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy m this is the first and great commandment. *And second is like unto it*, thou shalt love thy neighbour thyself." As though He had said, think not to n distinction between thy love to God and thy lov thy neighbour. They are both on the same le They are the complement of one another. And dear brethren, we find it. Nothing but the spiri Christ makes us truly benevolent. And that spiri Christ was the spirit of self-sacrifice for men, in o to fulfil the glorious purposes of God. We hear m in the present day, of social science. Great meet are held to deliberate for philanthropic objects,

consider social wrongs, and their remedies. Do not let us ever imagine that *mere science*, of any kind, will make men brethren, and banish their divisions, jealousies, and strifes. Exactly in proportion as the love of God takes possession of our hearts will the love of man become substantial, pure, and practical. And while we treat our fellow-creatures, not as spiritual beings, but as mere members of society, putting their earthly interests uppermost, neglecting the salvation of their souls, benevolence will be an irksome virtue, and its schemes a hopeless confusion.

The nearest approaches to brotherhood which the world makes, apart from Christianity, are the result of some great idea, some noble thought, above mere perishable outward things, which seizes the minds of multitudes, and binds them together in one common determination. Patriotism, the feeling of affection for their country, does, in many cases, greatly overcome the selfish tendencies of men. They unite together in the common cause of liberty and independence, and because they regard their neighbours as holding a higher relation to themselves than mere material things express, they rise above the petty feelings of a worldly rivalry, and consecrate themselves upon the altar of the common good. But if such ideas exercise so great an influence, what would those of religion do, had they but free course and undisputed sway amongst mankind! If we were all deeply impressed with the

preciousness of one another's souls, how should we shudder at the very thought of envy, covetousness, or contention! How should we labour to remove all stumbling-blocks out of our brother's way, and run to his relief with overflowing compassion, when we see him lying wounded by misfortune, or oppressed with cares! To realise the great idea of God, to bring to actual completion those exalted purposes formed by His mind concerning man, to give to Christianity an everlasting embodiment in a saved and glorified people,—that it is which inspires the true believer with a philanthropy such as the unconverted world can never know. We are "God's fellow-labourers." We are "ambassadors for Christ." As though fresh from the throne of heaven, we go forth upon the errand of divine compassion, "beseeching men that they be reconciled to God." Everything we do belongs to this glorious mission. We are always, and in all things, "ambassadors for Christ." If we are "diligent in business," we are "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." We can never forget His glory, whether in the busy street or in the consecrated house of prayer. "Whatever we do, in word or deed," as disciples of the Lord Jesus, all must be done "in His name, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."

Ought not the Christian man of business to be easily distinguished in the world? Is there not a tone of feeling in disciples of the lowly, self-denying, Jesus



which will naturally mingle with the commonest pursuits, and give them sanctity even to ungodly lookers on! Whatever unconverted men choose to make of life, there is one, only one, interpretation of its purpose which will satisfy the earnest followers of Christ. He lives to be a blessing and an honour to the world, *for the sake of his Redeemer*. Whatever transactions he has with the busy men of his age, he will never be contented with doing them *no wrong*; he will long to do them *good*. His constant effort, and his fervent prayer, will have this Christian end in view,—that he may win success to employ it faithfully for God, not simply to enjoy it for himself. If he cannot be rich, except by trampling on the feelings of his fellow-men, then will he cheerfully resign himself to poverty, or, at least to simplicity and moderation. If the selfishness cannot be resisted, when exertion is intense and industry conspicuous, then he will reconsider all the scheme of life, and adjust it with his character, as Christ's disciple, rather than with the notions of the world, or the rules of blind ambition. Oh! let Christians take the lead in fighting down the sordid, and unbrotherly, and soul-destroying uses of the times. Opportunities daily and hourly present themselves, for glorifying Christian principle in contrast with the darkness which surrounds us. Let our heaven-sent light "so shine that men may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."

Are we busy without Christ? Have we no decided spiritual principle? Is our life a random hunting after gold, or a mere battling for existence with the world's conditions? Then, let us be sure of this,—no bulwark we can raise will defend us from encroaching selfishness. We shall love our business, instead of loving our God and our neighbour. Cares and toils about material things will eat away the noble feelings from the heart. We shall less and less guard and reverence the links which bind us to the dearest and the best with whom we have to do. Duties will be thrown aside; wrongs will be thoughtlessly perpetrated, and lightly forgotten; and the crowd of hateful vices, envy, malice, pride, covetousness, and all their kindred will press upon our soul to destroy it.

Let the words of the Apostle John be with us, in every busy place and busy time,—“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”





THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP.

PSALM THE TWENTY-THIRD.

I.

"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT.

Psalm, xxiii., 1.

SHORT and simple, unpretending in structure, perfectly natural in language, the Twenty-third Psalm yet stands out from the wonderful book where we find it, as pre-eminently the song of songs. To say it has been the admiration of the world, is to say little. To countless multitudes it has been priceless comfort; the soul's anodyne in its keenest sufferings; a perennial spring of spiritual life and peace. Surely, in the six verses thus capable of inexhaustible application, blending with all the variety of human experience, we recognise, not the mere stamp of genius, but the fulness of a divine, unsearchable, Spirit. David's fingers touched the harp; God strung it and tuned it, breathing into the soul of His servant the strain which he drew forth into perfect rhythm.

The question has been asked,—Was David him-
 a shepherd, or was his shepherd life still fresh in
 memory when he thus sang? An answer is scarce
 necessary. A young, inexperienced, man is not lik-
 to have attained to the peaceful repose which breathes
 in the whole psalm, or to speak the language of
 retrospect so fully. One who has known weariness
 who has felt want; who has sought after waters of
 quietness; who has fainted, and been restored; who
 has toiled over rough places, and rejoiced again on
 plain paths; who has cried out for terror in a valley
 of death, and been comforted by a present deliverance
 who has fled from blood-thirsty enemies, and sat down
 again at a peaceful table, with anointed head and
 running over;—one who has mourned like a dove in
 exile from the house of God, and once more dwelt
 in the midst of goodness and mercy! Such an one is
 to us of the Shepherd and the sheep. May we
 suppose that this was the king, securely seated on
 throne, after long trial, after many escapes, after many
 fighting with men and things, himself henceforth
 shepherd to watch, shield, guide, a mighty flock under
 his rod and staff; offering the thanksgiving of his father
 recollecting the scenes of early life; bringing back
 into the midst of royal cares, and royal splendour
 the freshness of the fields, the simplicity of pastoral
 life, from the hill sides of Judea?

At the same time, though the realism of the psalm

points us to David's history, it may be said to be an echo of Old Testament faith, strictly in keeping with the voice which we hear all through the Word of God. No analogy so well sets forth the relation between Jehovah and His people, as we see it in the facts of His dealing with them, and in the testimonies of individual saints, as this simple one employed by David. The Shepherd and the sheep! The pasture prepared, the paths opened, the dangers averted, the enemies destroyed, the goodness and mercy in the house of the Lord! Is not that the Old Testament history throughout? Abraham lying down in Canaan. The patriarchs led up after Joseph. The great flock of Israel taken from the midst of enemies, under the rod of Moses, till they reached the quiet streams and green valleys of the Promised Land. "He made His people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock." Was not the predicted Saviour, even from the earliest times, "The Shepherd?" "*From Joseph,*" exclaimed dying Jacob, "*is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel.*" "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd," wrote Isaiah, "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Ezekiel dwells much upon the analogy. Zechariah, near the close of the prophetic period, cried, "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts. Smite the

Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn my hand upon the little ones."

And how exactly the relation between the believing soul and the God of Salvation, seems to be gathered into this simply analogy of the shepherd and the sheep! "The other names of God," says Martin Luther, "sound somewhat too gloriously and majestically, and bring, as it were, an awe and fear with them, when we hear them uttered. This is the case when the Scriptures call God our Lord, King, Creator. This, however, is not the case with the sweet word '*Shepherd*.' It brings to the godly, when they read it or hear it, as it were, a confidence, a consolation, or security, like the word *Father*. We cannot better understand this consoling and lovely word, than by going to nature, and learning carefully from her what are the dispositions and properties of the sheep, and what the duty, the labour, and the care of a good shepherd. A sheep can only live through the help, protection, and care of its shepherd. As soon as it goes astray it is exposed to dangers of every kind, and must perish, for it cannot help itself. The reason is, it is a poor, weak, silly creature. But weak creature though it be, it has the property about it that it keeps by its shepherd, with all diligence depends upon his help and protection; and if it can only be near him, it cares for nothing, is afraid of no one, but feels secure and happy, for it wants for nothing."

The first utterance of the Psalmist is the full chord of faith, afterwards drawn out into the peaceful flow of grateful recollection, calm confidence, and cheerful prospect. We will consider each verse as a distinct portion of the Divine Word. The first is the most comprehensive, but each one has a completeness in itself. All true faith will know itself reflected in David's words,—“The Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want.”

I. FAITH RESTS ON A REAL, PERSONAL, RELATION BETWEEN THE CREATURE AND THE CREATOR.

All religion is vain which shrinks from the reality of personal fellowship with God. Lofty language, abstract phraseology, vague sentiments, make a wretched substitute for the heart's converse with a Being loved and sought with intense yearning. In our own times, there is a tendency among many to restrain the language of piety, and make it as indefinite as possible, as though it were a kind of homage to the greatness of God for His creatures to speak of Him as afar off from their real feelings. Is there not a school of theology which is ever boasting of its spirit of freedom, but which seems to mean, by freedom, generality? How can we believe that He who marshals the hosts of heaven, to whom the greatest creature is infinitely insignificant, is in any true sense the Shepherd of sheep ! The language is too familiar!

Let us say rather, "The Lord is my First Cause. "The Lord is the Absolute, of which I am the reflection." "Let me acknowledge my littleness, adore and be silent."

Now, the faith which speaks in David is of the *heart*, and not of the *intellect*. Not only does he draw God near to himself, to be his loving, watchful Guardian, and daily Provider, but he recognises the covenant between the Lord and His people, and in that covenant he finds the security of the future. "The Lord is my shepherd." "*Jehovah*," was not, as some tell us, the name of a mere national deity. He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of the ancient covenant, handed down from the fathers. He revealed Himself to pious patriarchs and He did not to the world, as a God giving unto them "exceeding great and precious promises." Two names are employed in the Old Testament both translated "*God*," but only one "the Lord." "The first and earliest name is 'Elohim,' which," says a learned writer "exhibits God displayed in His power as the Creator and Governor of the physical universe; but the name '*Jehovah*,' the Lord, designates His nature as He stands in relation to man, as the only almighty, true personal, holy, Being—a Spirit and the Father of spirits, who revealed Himself to His people, made a covenant with them, and became their Lawgiver, and to whom all honour and worship are due." David:

faith was an intelligent, heartfelt, acceptance of that divine revelation, and of those gracious assurances ; and by that faith he was brought into direct intercourse with God ; he rested on Him ; he was pledged as His servant, and for ever reconciled as His loving, dependent, creature. No language less real, less living, would have expressed a faith which at once laid hold of the truth revealed, and surrendered the whole self to the personal God,—“The Lord is my shepherd.”

II. KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE FIND A VOICE IN THESE WORDS.

David knew something himself of what was included in the character of a shepherd. He knew by his own life's testimony, that the Lord was his Shepherd. While yet a youth his mind was opened to the teaching of divine Providence. A shepherd boy himself, he knew what it meant to take care of sheep. “Thy servant kept his father's sheep,” said the young hero to King Saul, explaining the secret of his challenge of the giant enemy, “and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock : and I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth : and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and smote him, and slew him.” Great deliverances ! Rescue from the enemy of souls ! Salvation from the gate of death ! To whom can they be ascribed, but to Him who could go out and smite

the destroyer? David's recognition of God's care for him was the opposite to that blind fatalistic which sees only the action of impersonal laws in earthly events. The Lord helped me; the Lord was like a shepherd, and drew me out of the pit; the Lord stood forth as my defender against the threatening me. And we cannot doubt that with the thought of providential deliverances, of which he had known so many, he remembered also the great dangers by which his soul had been assaulted, and the Grace of God by which he had overcome them, rejoicing in the peace of the divine fold and his pastures.

Though the language of the Psalms is often suggested by external circumstances, we must not suppose that believers of that time were strangers to the secrets of the soul. They knew, as we, what it was to be "with sins, and doubts, and fears." They could speak of the mental conflicts. The object of their faith was not always cloudless. Indeed, so real was the spiritual life, that they blended it with their life in external things. They saw God in their daily history. It was the very healthiness of their piety that they seldom spoke of their souls. "I shall not forsake my Soul and body, earthly interests, eternal salvation are under His care. And the true faith will not speak the language of knowledge and experience; it shall delight in the recollections which hold u

confidence. The Lord *was* my shepherd ; the Lord *has been* unceasingly my shepherd ; the Lord *is still* my shepherd. We were wandering like lost sheep. He went after us until He found us. He brought us to the fold. We were entangled in the thorns and briars of temptation and affliction ; they pierced us, they wounded us ; the more we struggled to be free, the faster they seemed to hold us ; we cried loudly for help, we fainted and despaired, and we were ready to die. But the hand of a Deliverer lifted us out, took us, trembling, weary ; laid us down on the soft grass beside the still waters, and restored our soul. It was the Shepherd ; He loved the sheep. It was the Lord. He is my Shepherd.

When we think of each sheep in the fold thus cared for, what a wonderful fulness of testimony can be gathered from the knowledge and experience of all who can say "the Lord is my shepherd !" The history of the Christian Church is the history of the Shepherd's love to the sheep. What assaults have been made from without on the fold of Christ ! What treachery has appeared within ! What persecutions have raged, like conflagrations, all round the sacred enclosure ! Heresies, schisms, corruptions of all kinds, springing up from the heart of men,—have they not threatened to scatter the sheep, and obliterate the very name of the flock ? But the Shepherd has never failed the sheep. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having

this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His; and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Hereafter that fulness of testimony shall be the fulness of glory. The sheep, all gathered into the heavenly fold, shall bear witness through eternity,— "We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." "To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

III. REALISATION OF THE SHEPHERD'S FAITHFULNESS IS SURRENDER TO HIS CARE FOR THE FUTURE.

"The Lord is my shepherd," therefore, *"I shall not want."* There are two elements in that confidence for the future. The one is, the disposition to rest in the will of Him who cares for us. The other is, preparation in the soul for the heavenly provision. These are not exactly the same, though they are allied. There may be a resignation to the Shepherd's will, while at the same time there is less preparation than there ought to be for the Shepherd's guidance. For resignation may be partly the natural effect of weakness. We may resign our own will, because we feel it unfit for the difficulties of the future; and, yet, we may not accept the Divine will simply desiring to "prove it good, and acceptable, and perfect." So, on the other hand, while Grace has bestowed upon us much by which the Heavenly Shepherd will feed and strengthen our souls, there may be lacking in us the simple-minded resignation and

trust which makes us rest in His will at all times. And David suggests to us, by his clear, decided, faith, how we may nourish both elements of confidence and be ready for the future. "The Lord is my shepherd." Then, surely, His will invites my resignation. "Ye have not chosen me," said the Lord Jesus, to His disciples, "but I have chosen you." The sheep lives for the sake of the Shepherd—the Shepherd does not live for the sake of the sheep, though He lays down His life for them—though their salvation is His glory. We know that the will of Him in whom we trust is the source from whence has flowed all our peace and hope for the future. "We love Him because He first loved us." "Of His own will begat He us with the word of Truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." Dare I call myself one of His fold, except He had Himself given me Grace to look to Him as my Shepherd? Then, in that same gracious will, I see, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. My own will face to face with the will of the Lord, I am "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." There is more than a mere recognition of the Divine character in David's words. There is surrender to that character as blended with a personal Will. "The Lord is *my Shepherd*,"—mine to keep me, to rule me, to sustain me, to perfect my nature; not as a weak, wandering, wilful, creature may choose or expect, but like a

Shepherd caring for His dependent sheep. And the faith to say "*I shall not want*," is the faith which thus resigns all self-will, and rests upon God. To look to the Shepherd, is to be confident. To see all things in God is to see all things "working together for good to those that love Him." We find it difficult to say "I shall not want," just in proportion as we look at earthly things in their connection with creature weakness and fickleness. Instinctively we fear, because instinctively we feel the disproportion there is between our will and the world. But when we realise, as, by faith, we can, that God, who holds all things in His hand, to whom all issues are alike possible, is Himself working out a perfect plan, and puts us where we are appoints us the life we live, because He uses us as instruments in the fulfilment of that holy will, not as blind, passive, means to be worked up into results but co-workers together with God, His beloved children, making the glory of His house; then indeed, we both delight in the thought that He requires of us resignation and we cheerfully yield it looking forward to the end with the calm assurance of those who cannot fear, because "the Lord is" their "shepherd."

The soul, however, needs to be prepared for the Shepherd's provision, just as truly as the Shepherd's provision is prepared for the soul. "I shall not want." But I might want, though plenty were around me

I might lose care for the food. I might lose sight of the pasture. I might sink into a state of atrophy, and for sheer weakness be incapable of rewarding the Shepherd's care! Such fears will sometimes start up in the mind. We may be always within the sphere of spiritual influences; can we be sure that we shall never forfeit the Spirit—that we shall never be cast out of the fold as no longer worth the Shepherd's love? Undoubtedly, David's "I shall not want" was not boastful self-assertion; nor was it mere vapid, careless, merging of all thought in the present. His soul was prepared by the Grace of God for the future to which he looked; and it is well to consider, a moment, what kind of preparation is required of us.

First. We ought to be prepared for the Shepherd's care, by a place in the fold. The fold does not make the sheep; but the fold is of the Shepherd's appointing, that the sheep may be the better under His eye and hand. We cannot trace the exact limits of Christ's fold. We cannot say all beyond certain boundaries are not to be called *the sheep*. But we can find, every one in his own individual life, that which reveals to us the Shepherd's will. And, surely, we cannot doubt that He calls us into fellowship with His people, as to His fold. We *may* be under His care, though we live a perfectly solitary life. He will not forsake us, though our lot should be cast away from all public ordinances; though we should hear no friendly Christian voices

encouraging and consoling, but should be **alone** against the world. But most often He shows us **the** fold in His Church. We can see that there is **the** special care, for we can see the special opportunity. We can bring our Christian life into contact with **His** manifold Grace among the many under His **hand**. We ought to be where we shall be most sure **of** heavenly provision. Then we are prepared the **better** to say, "I shall not want."

Secondly. It is required of us that we lay hold of **the** Shepherd's Grace, by the active efforts of our life. "**The** diligent soul shall be made fat." How often we **blame** the care taken of us when we ought to **blame the** indifference and sluggishness of our own **disposition** ! Pastures may be green, and yet those that are **in them** may feed poorly. Waters may flow, and yet those **that** are beside them may perish of thirst. Activity, **indeed**, is not all the Christian life. Too much effort **may take** away appetite. Some deceive themselves in the publicity of modern times, so that they ignore their own **spiritual** deficiencies. But the commonest error is the **opposite**. Abundant opportunities are provided by the Shepherd of the sheep ; those who might find in them **rapid** growth and firm strength, lose them for lack of **resolute** endeavour and real devotedness. We "**shall not want**" preparation for trial ; we "**shall not want**" comfort in tribulation ; we "**shall not want**" the joy of **spiritual** acquisition ; we "**shall not want**" the rich blessings of

a fruitful experience ; we "*shall not want*" peace and victory in death ; if the Shepherd's voice be always willingly followed, and even through self-denial and suffering cheerfully obeyed.

Lastly. Preparation of soul is the gift of God in answer to prayer. One place there is where the Lord waits to reveal Himself our Shepherd. He invites us to His throne of Grace, that we may see Him there, looking down upon our weakness with His eye of compassion ; holding forth to us His sceptre of all-sufficient strength, that we may touch it and feel that our nothingness is linked with His kingly glory. Oh ! with what energy He can fill us at that place where we meet Him as humble suppliants ; with what conscious newness of nature He can send us forth to the world ! The Spirit of the Shepherd Himself takes possession of the sheep. A little flock of disciples, at first scattered by persecution, flying for fear, gathers together into an upper room, in Jerusalem, all continuing "with one accord in prayer and supplication." How soon that prayer was answered—the little flock filled with holy boldness ! "Fear coming upon every soul" around them ! "Many signs and wonders done by the Apostles !" Believers "daily continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart : praising God, and having favour with all the people." The Shepherd knows how to

bless the sheep, and He has said "ask and it shall be given you;" "seek and ye shall find." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Consecrated, diligent, prayerful, we shall be prepared for all His Grace. We shall know how to sing, with David's cheerful confidence, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want!"

Is any state, short of complete surrender to the Saviour, short of believing dependence upon Him consistent with such a prospect? "I shall not want! What, uncleansed of guilt, and not wanting an advocate? Depending on yourself, and never wanting better strength than your own! Shall we want no light in dark places? No Christian consolation in the loneliness of sorrow? No voice of the Shepherd in "the dark valley of the shadow of death?" Believe it not! Three thousand years have passed since David sang his song of faith. The world has changed its features, but not its nature. The life which the shepherd boy, raised to the throne, felt to be the only life worth living, is the life which can be lived in any place, among any circumstances, with any appointed lot; it is the life of faith in the Son of God. It is a life of real peace, satisfaction, fearless outlook, perfect security. A life which begins in the earthly, which blooms for ever in the heavenly, fold!





THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

II.

THE LIFE OF PEACE.

"HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES:
HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS."

Psalm, xxiii. 2.

THE words of Scripture require one kind of commentary but too seldom employed,—that, namely, which is written by Grace in the heart and life. How much of the simple language of the Psalms remains barren and powerless, in its familiarity, for lack of such a sympathy as would connect it with our own experience! "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." As the same Holy Ghost moves in our affections, and frames our history, He bestows upon us the gift of interpretation.

David speaks in his own person, and thus sets before us the truth which was given him, as fact which his own life testified. "The Lord is my shepherd." Our faith is not real except it delights in facts; except it is using experience as daily nourishment. Though

in this Twenty-third Psalm no one historical feature appears identifying the writer, still every spiritual fact set forth is manifestly drawn from life. So true is every word to the spiritual realities of which it speaks that we never exhaust the application of such a psalm. We feel it more and more helpful to declare our own faith and praise. Here, then, is the first and nearest of the believer's thankful testimonies to the Shepherd Grace,—“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

The Shepherd knows where the sheep will find supplies. He brings it, spite of its own ignorance and wilfulness, to the chosen spot. Going before, He leadeth “beside the still waters.” How excellent His provision! Grassy places, where the softly flowing stream offers refreshment; shady banks, where overhanging branches shield from the noontide heat; rich pasture, where the hungry find abundance, and the satisfied lie down to rest!

I. THE LORD, THE SHEPHERD, IS HERE ADORED AS THE SOURCE OF BLESSEDNESS TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM.

“I am in His hand. He chooses out for me the place of blessed life. He maketh me to know His blessedness. He guides me into peace. He keeps me in the way of peace.” Both the outward disposition of his life and the secret history of his soul

revealed to the Psalmist a divine control, in which he rejoiced to feel himself. When the storms of trouble had passed by, and the calm enjoyment of life returned, he could look back and recognise how little his own foresight, and his own strength, had to do with providing the "green pasture" in which he was lying down. "Wonderfully hast Thou dealt with me," he exclaimed, "Thou gracious Guide of my ways!" "In Thy favour is life!" And so, when his soul rejoiced in the food set before him in Divine Truth, and when in the house of God, he saw "the power and glory," which "satisfied him, as with marrow and fatness," which were as refreshing water in "a dry and thirsty land," he adored the Good Shepherd, as the source of all his blessedness. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters."

This controlling, providing, love appears in all the dealings of the Shepherd with the sheep. See, how it was with the little flock first gathered about the Shepherd during the season of His earthly humiliation and ministry. In those early days of their association with Jesus, disciples were, as yet, but on the way to "green pastures" and "still waters." They were not lying down in the peace of full enjoyment. They clung as sheep to the shepherd, following closely. They "trusted that it was He who would redeem Israel." Step by step, waiting, watching, hoping, they went

after Him to Jerusalem. Some still followed, though the cloud fell upon Him, and though afar off, trembling, amazed, bewildered, they witnessed His agony and death. Whither had the vision vanished? Where was the "green pasture;" where flowed the "still waters?" No one, of all those first disciples, left to himself at that point of his Master's humiliation, would have recovered hope and triumphed over despondency. The full joy of faith would never have been realised. The wonders and delights of the past would have withered away into barren recollections. The Word of God, which had seemed to be opening its promise like a broad land of plenty, would have shrunk into an arid wilderness. Jesus had compassion on their infirmity. The Good Shepherd knew the sheep. He loved them. He "went before them and they followed Him." He brought them out into the wealthier place. Risen from the sepulchre, He led them from proof to proof of His Messiahship, till He filled their hearts with assurance; He talked with them concerning His kingdom till they felt its power already possessing them; and, as He stood on the Mount ready to ascend to His invisible throne, He gave them that parting benediction and commission which dispelled all lingering doubt, and set on each head the halo of a heavenly consecration. And when Jesus was no longer their visible Leader, did not another Comforter "take of the things of Christ," and show

them to His followers? From one attainment and achievement to another, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, the little flock was still led on till the Church of Christ appeared, founded on the Rock; a place of abundant pasture, where divine food was provided, where "the still waters" of Christian fellowship continually flowed.

We should find the same loving control and foresight illustrated in the history of the individual disciples, could we follow the facts of their lives. The three great leaders of the primitive Church, the Apostles Peter, John, and Paul, were they not themselves led through special discipline, unusual revelations; and their place of chosen work and final rest appointed to them by the "Great Shepherd of the sheep?" So, in the troublous times which quickly came upon the flock of God, the Shepherd showed that He knew where lay the green pastures; where flowed the still waters. Scattered by stormy persecutions, the sheep were driven forth over the world; but, again and again, the churches had rest. A raging enemy was taken out of the way. A cruel edict was revoked. Wandering sheep found themselves unexpectedly in "quiet resting places."

Much as there is in these times of ours to perplex and to dismay, dark as the future lowers in some directions, can we doubt that the Shepherd will, in His own good time, and by His own wise guidance,

make us to lie down in green pastures and beside still waters? He will make rough places plain, crook things straight. He will break down steep mountains of unbelief; He will lift up the yawning depths of division and separation. We shall see smiling before us, in the sunshine of Christian unity and peace, the rich fields of Truth, the sparkling waters of social contentment and brotherly love—a new world under a new heaven!

And are we, as individuals, rejoicing in the blessedness of Christian life? Surely, our testimony is the same. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters." "By the Grace of God I am what I am." If the Shepherd had not, by His loving hand, drawn me from my wanderings, I should still have pined and famished in the desert. How long the pasture remained untasted, how long the river of peace flowed in vain for me! And still, though one of the flock, such is the wilfulness He has to overcome, that, left to myself, I should soon lose the riches and sink into poverty. Day by day He leadeth me by His Spirit; teaching, correcting, inviting; that the pastures may not be out of sight, that the sound of waters may still be in my ears. What unwearying tenderness, what sleepless vigilance, what divine knowledge, sweetly compel the helpless creature and keep it in the way! The weakest, the sickliest; those most bruised and wounded with the

sharp stones and cutting briars; those that can only drag themselves slowly, with many pauses for rest, along the road,—He draws them by His love, holds them up and cheers them on, until each can say, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

II. THE NEW BLESSEDNESS OF BELIEVERS IS SET FORTH. IT IS THREEFOLD. SAFETY, FULNESS, RESTFUL DELIGHT.

1. *Perfect safety* is provided by the Shepherd. The sheep is a defenceless creature. Attacked by other animals, it falls an easy prey, because it is neither strong nor fleet. The pasture, therefore, to be enjoyed must be safe. However green and rich, if savage beasts can invade it, if terrible sounds can be heard in it, the timid sheep will not lie down; it will tremble and flee, instead of feeding and resting. Many of man's self-originated religions look fair, but prove unsafe. For awhile there is peace, but the delusion is broken up by the dreadful invasion of an unsatisfied conscience. From one spot to another the soul hurries, snatching poor food by the way, pursued by its own haunting fears. It cannot lie down in security. The place is not really safe. But the Great Shepherd of the sheep surrounds His beloved ones with infinite strength. “We have not followed cunningly devised fables.” We can look at our Shepherd and behold in

Him "the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person." Already, He has "subdued principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly." Already, He has overcome in the great conflict. "I beheld," He cried, "Satan as lightning from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Jesus invites us to *lie down* in green pastures. He would have us free, perfectly "from the law of sin and death," that "the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" might "fulfill righteousness in us." We cannot be partakers of progressive sanctification, except we rejoice in a complete justification. Holiness is the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit is borne by the living tree. The living tree derives its power from the deep roots. There are many sheep in Christ's fold whose life is feeble because they have not laid hold as they should of His Grace as their deliverer from all condemnation. They are fighting with fears where they should be feeding on Truth. They are listening for the voice of enemies where they should be seeking out refreshing pasture. A well-grounded confidence is

beginning of spiritual attainments. "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but we have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father." Are we ransomed, are we returning to Zion from our banishment, forgiven, reconciled, having "obtained mercy?" Then our way is "*the way of Holiness*." "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon: it shall not be found there." "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." Safety is provided. In the feeling of the Shepherd's nearness let us lie down in the green pastures, and take to ourselves their rich Grace, that we may by our strength and by our joyfulness glorify the Shepherd, singing the song of the redeemed,—“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”


2. *Fulness* is another feature of our blessedness. "I shall not want." The pastures are rich and vast. The waters are deep and still. The Prophet Isaiah, foreseeing the blessedness of the Gospel, wrote: "They shall feed in the ways, and their pasture shall be in all the high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them." Spiritual truth thus supplies fulness to the soul. Of all lower objects on which the mind can be engaged, it may be said that,

while the intellect may never be perfectly satisfied that it has exhausted their meaning, still the soul itself may be sated and weary of their presence. The student of science, the philosopher, the naturalist—they may all say, of their different intellectual pursuits, that they are intensely interesting and absorbing while they engage them; but they are not coextensive with the wants of a human soul. Our conscience asks for peace. Our heart hungers for food for its affections. Our love, our sympathies, our aspirations, our spiritual instincts—they turn often from all material things, from all earthly relationships, worn out and weary, longing for that in which our whole soul can lie down and rest. Active powers demand their sphere of exercise. How has the fine gold of some brilliant nature become dim in a perverted activity! What waste of power there is in the world because energies are misdirected! Immortal, accountable, creatures need divine instruction, lest they drag their honour in the dust, and “sell their birthright for a mess of pottage.” The Good Shepherd provides for the sheep. Mind, heart, hand, all find adapted wealth. Can we exhaust the fulness of Christ in any direction? Is He our meditation? We find at each turn in life new pastures opened. The same familiar page which thrilled our infancy, fires the thought of our manhood, and refreshes our old age with wonder. We never look but we exclaim, “I have seen an end of all

perfection : but Thy commandment is exceeding broad." In the Shepherd's love there are heights and depths which no heart has fully known. "It passeth knowledge." And what condition among earthly things so satisfying as the service to which He calls us! He fits it to our capacity. He prepares the occasions. He draws out more and more the interest we feel in it. So, whether we think of Christian life as engaged with knowing the truth, or feeding the affections, or occupying the energies, the believer can always rejoice in fulness of provision. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters."

3. *The blessedness of restful delight.* It is the special distinction of spiritual joy, that it fills the soul without overbalancing it. The delights of sense, when they are at their highest, exhaust us by their intensity of mere physical excitement, and leave behind them a reaction of depression, painful and harmful. But, in the words of Robert Hall, we may say, "The fruition of religious objects calms and purifies, as much as it delights; it strengthens, instead of enervating, the mind, which it fills without agitating, and, by settling it on its proper basis, diffuses an unspeakable repose through all its powers." David found restful delight in religion, which, as compared with all other, he described, in the beautiful metaphors of the text, as "lying down in green pastures," being led by the

"still waters." In every variety of Christian life and experience, this restful delight is realised. But we must not expect that, in a state of conflict such as the present world necessitates, "green pastures" and "still waters" should be the permanent condition out of which we never have to go. Rather we should distinguish the places of repose from the way of duty. We would not live for delight alone. But we thankfully acknowledge He giveth us sweet refreshment; He calls us, again and again, out of the hot, dusty, road of service, to the living, reviving, pleasures which He knows how to minister. Thus He deals with us when He brings us into some calm seclusion of solitude. The world's businesses, for a season, cannot reach us. The throng of human interests, the clamour of controversies, the fears and fightings of an earnest life, have been left awhile for the place of refreshing silence and healing peace. The soul finds in contemplation that which it cannot find in active service. Mary at the feet of Jesus, beholding, listening, hopefully waiting on His word, knows a deeper joy than her sister, "cumbered about much serving." Only as we sustain those more spiritual feelings which require us at times to be sitting at the Master's feet, and rejoicing in His refreshing fellowship, shall we resist the natural tendency of activity to deaden the more delicate sympathies of our nature. We feed the mind with a higher aspect of Truth, when we give ourselves



to meditation in solitude. We want that higher aspect of Truth, that we may not lose our spirituality in the rough ways of the world. The Shepherd knows the necessities of our nurture. He appoints us seasons of solitude. He cuts us off, at times, from the possibility of active effort. He leads us away by the guidance of events into the restful retreat; the "green pastures," where we quietly feed the soul: the "still waters," which renew and quicken our flagging affections.

David's description recalls, too, the blessedness of divine ordinances. Communion with the Shepherd in the flock; participation with those whose praises blend with ours, whose faith is embodied in the same emblems, whose love is directed to the same object, of the body which has been broken for us, of the blood which was shed for all,—is it not restful delight? There are no places in all our life where the pasture seems so rich, and the water so reviving, as that place where Christians come together to remember Jesus. Desire after spiritual things seems to be quickened there. Doubts which had robbed us of power to lay hold of the Shepherd's Grace seem to be dispelled. The presence of the flock is a stimulus to each individual member of it. The presence of the Shepherd Himself is more real. We return to the work and strife of the daily lot, thankfully saying,—“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

Are we making this world our resting place ?
 we lying down in a false peace ? Are we drinkin
 water which cannot quench the thirst of an imm
 spirit ? Let David's words remind us that one ch
 there is which alone can deliver us from delusion,
 bring us from the wilderness to the land of safety
 delight. We must be able to say, "The Lord is
 shepherd." Come to that protecting, guiding, H
 Yield to that loving control. Let Him open the
 let Him provide the joy ; let Him be the Sheph
 He has promised, "I will give you rest." "Come
 me." "Learn of me." "Take my yoke upon ;
 You will find the blessedness in Him which you
 always lack away from Him. You will be conse
 of safety ; you will rejoice in abundance ; you will
 in your happiness, appropriating the acknowledg
 of all who belong to the true fold,—“He maketh *n*
 lie down in green pastures : He leadeth *me* beside
 still waters.”





THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

III.

RESTORATION.

"HE RESTORETH MY SOUL : HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE."—Psalm xxiii., 3.

IN the stress of this world's toil and strife, the soul often sinks down fainting ; needing a strong hand to lift it up, and a powerful restorative to bring back its living will. . Slowly, but surely, the "heat and burden of the day," bearing long upon the animal powers, wears and wastes them, till one link in the too tightly stretched chain, weaker than the rest, snaps asunder, and the man lies stricken to the ground, helpless, strengthless ;—work unfinished, difficulties unconquered, hopes unrealised. Or, like a lost sheep, which has wandered far away from the beaten path into the rough trackless wilderness ; wearied out with vain efforts to recover the right way, torn by the briars, wounded by the sharp rocks against which it

has fallen, footsore, parched with thirst, exhausted with fatigue, fainting for food, panting and feebly bleating in the solitary place, where none seem near to help, the soul sinks into despair. The world has been tried, its pleasures have lost their attraction ; its emptiness has bitterly disappointed its worshipper ; rougher and rougher the path has grown, till nothing but barren desolation has surrounded the wanderer. "He looked on his right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know him ; refuge failed him ; no man cared for his soul." Or, again, the "storm of sorrow" has caught a weak creature, suddenly, without shelter ; the darkness fell upon him ; the fierce blows came rapid one after the other, till he lay prostrate with terror and exhaustion ; not knowing how to rise ; trembling with fear of still greater calamities ; expecting death.

Many are the soul's extremities. Some the natural issues of overburdened weakness ; some the just working out of violated laws ; some the mysterious appointments of an inscrutable Providence. David's experience was almost unlimited. He knew the weight of anxious toil, and what it was to feel it crushing him to the earth. He knew the misery of a life which fled from pursuing enemies, hiding in dens and caves of the mountains ; suffering extremes of hunger and thirst. He knew the exhausting agony of grief, with "tea for his meat day and night." He knew the desolation of guilt ; the wilderness of an accusing conscience.

the awful bewilderment of a sinner, who has come to himself in the very midst of his own wretchedness. He remembered a Mercy which "*brought his soul out of prison,*" and "*compassed him about with songs of deliverance.*" It was the mercy of the Good Shepherd, who "goeth after that which is lost until He find it." "He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

HERE ARE ACKNOWLEDGED THE MERCY OF DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS ; THE FITNESS OF DIVINE MINISTRATIONS ; THE GLORY OF DIVINELY ACCOMPLISHED ISSUES.

1. One who sees the Shepherd's care in his life, acknowledges *the mercy of Divine interpositions*. "*He restoreth my soul.*" An extremity confessed by us was the opportunity used by God. It was not an ordinary danger ; had it been so, we might have attributed much to the native elasticity of the soul. We were past recovery by ourselves. If a Divine hand had not laid hold of us and restored us, we must have perished. His mercy interposed. We *were* restored. We went on in the path in which He Himself graciously led us, as we were able to walk. We dare not ascribe our rescue to anything but His immediate, compassionate, interposition.

Such mercy may have visited a soul wandering away from God, in a state of *spiritual decline and*

backsliding. Neglected opportunities have produced indifference; chronic coldness of heart; blindness to danger, and infatuated self-will. Who recover the fainting hope? Who knit together again the broken resolutions? We remember the time. We wonder that anything could restore us. *He* knew the whole secret of our state. *He* understood the reasons of our life. *He* knew the worth of our excuses. *He* mercifully sent exactly the right remedy. *He* brought us to ourselves. It was His interposition that took us, in our wandering, into that place of bitter shame and suffering, where we woke up suddenly to feel what danger there was in backsliding, and we cried out, with all our might, "Lord, save, or I perish!" It was His interposition that provided the voice of warning which thrilled us through; the kindly Hand which was laid upon our shoulder, with the question, "*Whither away?*"—the Providential appointment which exactly met our repentance, and led it out into decided change and renewed life. "*He restoreth my soul.*"

He came when *sorrow* had worked a sad change in us. We were like a shattered vessel. The agony of a grief beyond all human consolation, had broken our strength into fragments. Thought had become almost impossible. Energy seemed gone. The occupations of life looked at us like cold-hearted strangers, and we shrunk away from them, though

really so familiar with them. "Can life ever be the same?" we cried. "Is not death itself better than such dreary desolation?" But the mind resumed its activity. Energy returned. Occupations became again attractive. Life, though never the same, because never without a remembered loss, was not a cheerless waste, but the threshold of the future. We looked forward more; we looked around us less. Hope had been kindled afresh by the fiery trial which had consumed some of our earthly joys. The brightness of heaven henceforth lay upon the path, shining more and more; and it will shine unto the perfect day. Was it not merciful interposition? "*He restoreth my soul.*"

Or, it may have been otherwise with us. We look back and recall an averted calamity. We watched and waited for it, with a suspense which seemed to press out the very marrow of our soul with its awful weight. It was a time of such mingled terror and oppressive helplessness, that we often feel astonished, as we remember it, that reason did not give way. If the expected shock had followed upon the continued strain, surely nothing could have recovered us. But His mercy interposed. The trial was not greater than we could bear. The danger passed. The weight was lifted off. The overwrought heart found rest. The scaring terror vanished, and the tears of joy refreshed us with a sense of recovered nature. "*He restoreth my soul.*"

Who is there that cannot record such mercy! Whose experience has never revealed to him a Hand greater than his own at work in his life! Who has not at some time felt himself dealt with by a loving Power all-sufficient in his weakness; bringing back the joy of salvation; upholding with His free Spirit! It is the Shepherd caring for the sheep. We dare not, we would not, forget,—“*He restoreth my soul.*”

2. There is acknowledgment, in David's words, of the fitness of Divine ministrations to the facts of individual life. “*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.*” That is to say, when, by special interposition, He has recovered my soul from danger, from a state of prostration and threatened death, then, He leadeth me on, just as I am able to go, in the right path, towards perfect peace and safety. In the merciful dealing of the Shepherd with the sheep, we must recognise, not only the love which flies to our rescue, but the patience, the unchangeable, unwearied, affection, which adopts its constant ministrations to our continued necessities.

Now, whether we look at the leading grace of Providential appointments, or at the wonderful adaptation of Divine ordinances to the weakness of our state, we must adore the same perfection of the Shepherd. The right path is pointed out to us, and the right steps to take, that we may advance in that path. We have

stood still, just restored from the extremity of sorrow, able at last to think about going forward. And, yet, how shall we go? What must be the next step? Has a true believer had to wait long before he was compelled, by the merciful ministration which was sent him, to exclaim, "*He leadeth me?*" The event went before which opened the way. The desired counsel came which gave clear decision to our steps. We had nothing to do but to follow. Or, it may be, that a good man has struggled long with what seemed an insuperable difficulty. Patient toil, anxious, earnest, striving, seemed all in vain. He sank down, at last, before the shut door, able to knock no longer, fainting for very weariness and despondency. The rescuing mercy of God, not only called back his spirits, but showed him the difficulty vanished, the gate opened, the way clear before him, inciting him to new efforts and new faith. He wakes up to understand his life. "*He leadeth me.*" The soul that has wandered acknowledges, oftentimes, the same leading mercy. When the quickened conscience has confessed His presence, when the subdued heart has yielded itself to the gentle Hand which has laid hold of it again, is there not an evident adaptation of Providential appointments to the demands of the restored soul? The new desires see it so. The searching earnestness of repentance lays hold readily of the helping facts around. We may be halting and stumbling still, but

we advance. He sends friendly faces to cheer us ; He snatches away dreaded temptations ; He shows us the chain to the lions in the way ; He suggests to us methods of life which bring back our lost happiness and restore our broken habits. From one stage to another, we are conscious of most merciful ministrations, adapted exactly to the successive requirements. We adore His condescending patience. "*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.*"

Not in Providential dealings alone, but in the provisions of religious opportunity, we behold the adaptation of mercy to individual necessities. The written Word often leadeth us. A single verse of Scripture will sometimes come out of the page with such marvellous clearness of meaning, and such unusual exactness of application, that it may be compared to the hand of another laying hold of our hand and leading us onward. Promises which we know well by heart, and which we have repeated to ourselves thousands of times, seem to be uttered by a supernatural voice in our ear, as the special encouragement for the special trial. Our reading of the Scripture whatever portion of it is before us, seems to be looking down upon earthly things from a height above them, and seeing them all as comparatively insignificant. The written Word leadeth us, over the difficulties, through the clouds ; holding us up in the rough places ; opening the prospect into life ! T

services of the Sanctuary are employed by the same Mercy. We have found everything in those services lay hold of our soul, and lead it on. The songs of praise seemed like our own heart coming out of its depths of gloom, and mounting upward towards heaven; the petitions of God's people seemed to draw our desires onward, and put new strength into our holy resolutions; the unfolding of the Truth seemed the unfolding of the future. We could see things differently. We could look further than our own insignificant surroundings. We came from the house of God rejoicing,—This is advancement; there is sufficient Grace for me; I can persevere and reach the end. *"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness."*

3. The glory of Divine Mercy is glory to the Shepherd's name. *"For His name's sake,* He restoreth my soul." *"For His name's sake,"* He leadeth me to the glorious issue. His name is identified with the safety and peace of His people. David's faith was not resting on sentiment; on mere individual experience; on outward, earthly, facts. If it had been so with him, he would not have sung his confidence so calmly, with that heavenly sweetness which breathes in his psalm. The very form which his words take is a clue to the kind of faith he exercised. He is not dwelling upon the past of his own history, as though he made it everything. He tells it as evidence of the

Shepherd's character. He places his trust in the personal, ever-living, never-absent, Redeemer. So he sings, not "He *has restored* my soul," but "He *restoredh* my soul;" not "He *has in past times* led me," but "He *leadeth* me," *now, always*, "in the paths of righteousness." His name is my assurance; "*for His name's sake*" He is my faithful, merciful, Shepherd.

"What is His Name?" This is the question of our deepest soul. We cannot trust in an unknown God. We cannot realise the presence of an unnamed Being. Nor is it enough for one who desires to feel himself led in paths of righteousness, like the sheep led by the shepherd, to look at God as the Author of natural laws; as the moral Governor of the world; as the Ordainer of all events and issues! We want more than this general name of God. We want such a name to be revealed as we can feel assured is identified, in a special manner, with our own being. David found that name in "*Jehovah*." We, as Christians, find it yet more distinctly in "*Jesus*." It is a Name which, while it is man's, is also God's. We know that God has taken our weakness into His strength. We believe in His name, because in that name He has declared Himself "all our salvation and all our desire." All our experience is an unfolding to us of the Name in which we trust. "I know," says the tried one, "in whom I have believed." I know that His name is above every name. I know that He is to me all that

His name promises. I know that "*for His name's sake*" He cannot leave unfinished the work which is begun.

The path in which the Shepherd leadeth us is not an endless seeking without finding. He knows the issue. He beholds the end from the beginning. His Name must be glorified in the praises of eternity. The issue of His wonderful dealings, the resting place after all the leading through the paths of righteousness,—must it not be His name shining out like the sun, filling all existences with the light of His countenance? The Shepherd leads the sheep now. He rescues them, restores them, takes them out of the wrong way, carries them forward in the paths of righteousness. But the sheep cannot know all that the Shepherd is in Himself, until the time of their trial is past, and the time of their rest has come. "We shall see Him as He is." Thoughts of our own necessities will no longer intervene as clouds before His face. Wrestlings of soul will exhaust us no more. All tears wiped away; all temptations held aloof; nothing shall disturb the fixed, rapt, adoration of Him in whose glory we shall feel ourselves transfigured. Millions of ages will wear out none of His glories. "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Let us, then, link together the present and the future! As He leadeth us, day by day, along the paths of righteousness, often bidding us simply trust in

His love, because we cannot trace His wisdom, let us remember His name! We shall come out at last into the place which He has prepared for us, and His promise shall be realised,—“ I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God ; and I will write upon him my new name.” In the expectation of that glorious issue, let us patiently wait ; let us watch ; let us work ; gratefully singing the Shepherd’s praise,—“ He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake ! ”





THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

IV.

THE DARK VALLEY.

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME."—Psalm xxiii., 4.

HOWEVER great the troubles out of which we have already come, we can think of still greater in the way before us. The past lends its dark colours to imagination. There can be, there may be, a concentration of gloom and danger into one spot. As though Death itself brooded, with his black wings, over the place, so that every step was in the shadow of overhanging destruction, we may find ourselves where strength of our own is cut off, darkness lying like leaden bonds on every limb, the way itself hidden from our eyes, while terrors close in upon us on every side.

"The valley of the shadow of death?" Where is it?

When shall we find ourselves in the middle of it? Is it midway on our course? Is it only the last enemy's attack close on the borders of our land of rest? Is it at the foot of the mountain on whose heights we shall stand in everlasting exaltation? He who alone appoints the light and the darkness, alone knows. Such a shadow may never be upon us. Death itself to some is no dreadful place of conflict. The clouds that seemed gathering for storm are pierced by the rays of a Saviour's presence. Not even a shudder passes through them. Light, peaceful, joyful, light goes with them to the gate, through the gate, into the brightness of heaven. Through all the pilgrimage no such fearful spot may be reached. And, yet, we must contemplate the possibility. Earth itself may send up from its gloomy depths a darkness as of death, to wrap us round. Cloud after cloud of sorrow, of suffering, of temptation, may roll itself upon us, until we seem to be under the pall of night, and creature weakness, unsupported by divine strength, would utterly succumb. Wherever we are, through such a crisis we may have to pass. Shall we go through it? Will the evil destroy? Can we still hold fast by that Hand of power? "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." "He leadeth me." He who is greater than death. He whose light cannot be darkened, whose hand cannot relax its grasp, whose purpose cannot be defeated. We want David's "*Yea*."

It must come out of the same calm depth of resignation and trust. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

FEARLESSNESS, IN PROSPECT OF THE FUTURE, IS HERE EXPRESSED; AND THAT FEARLESSNESS IS ASCRIBED TO THE GRACIOUS MANIFESTATION OF THE SHEPHERD'S PRESENCE AND POWER.

1. In prospect of the future, the believer may be *fearless*. "I will fear no evil." Such language would seem at first almost to savour of boasting. Some natures are so constituted that even comparatively small dangers, when they are anticipated, cast a terrible shadow before on the busy imagination. Not only do they dwell more than others on the future, but their own disposition lends terror to every prospective evil. That they should fear seems a necessity; certainly, not a sin. Some of the best of men have felt the shadow of death lying cold upon them, whenever they have thought of it. They could not overcome the fear of that last encounter. Mystery lays hold with much more force of some minds than of others. And, not unfrequently, those who meet danger the most fearlessly in the actual onset, have apprehended it the most painfully beforehand. While, on the contrary, the absence of fear is no criterion of

courage, or of true preparation, because it may indicate ignorance, rather than foresight; indifference, rather than discipline.

We must not mistake David's fearlessness. He could not mean,—I am so sure of myself, that I can safely predict unfailing courage in the hour of extremest trial. With perfect simplicity, he could mean,—I will not doubt that whatever the evil, it will be left behind, passed through, harming me nothing. It was no prediction of his own unchangeableness; but a casting out of his mind, in view of the future, of all doubt as to the sufficiency and faithfulness of his Divine Shepherd. Such a fearlessness is not only possible, in the case of every believer, but a natural fruit of faith which all should wait for and seek. "I will fear no evil."

Long before we reach the borders of our heavenly land we require such a faith. A Christian is often placed where, like Martin Luther, when he stood face to face with the whole array of opposition against him, he must put down his foot firmly on the rock and say, "Here I stand; I can do no other; God help me!" That there is evil all round us; that we must feel it pressing upon us; that its darkness covers us; that it might be death—all that need not hinder our progress. Evil cannot be stronger than good. Whatever lies in the way can be overcome by him who is bent upon resisting the evil. Our great dreamer represents

Christian, just as he entered the valley of the shadow of death, encountering certain terrified ones, "children of them that brought up an evil report of the good land," who cried "Back! back!" and by their own scared imaginations painted the dreadful dangers of the way; but Christian answered, "*I perceive not yet, by what you have said, but that this is my way to the desired haven.*" That is the secret of fearlessness. It is in my way—it must be gone through; I will fear no evil. How much the clear recognition of the path, and the feeling of it firm and solid beneath our feet, contributes to that fearlessness!

A religion which consists chiefly of passive frames and feelings, dependent upon ministrations from without, not resting on the conscience enlightened by truth and governed by duty, will shrink from every dark shadow in the way. When we have roused the whole nature into the activity of Christian achievement, into intense reaching forth to the things that are set before us, the confidence that we are treading the right path, and seeking the right end, drives out all cowardice. We make every experience of victory a new preparation for future conflict; we are afraid of nothing, because we know that "He who has begun the good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

2. The Shepherd's *presence and power* are the source from whence fearlessness is drawn. "Thou art with me." No evil can be about me which Thou dost not see through, however dark to my sight. David has been taught by the facts of his own history that darkness was not necessarily ruin. He had known periods of suffering, of desolation, of apparently irretrievable disaster, pass by, and leave him more than ever persuaded that his Divine Guardian held him fast, and wrought out faithfully the fulfilment of His word. He saw that that Hand, which works alike in the light and in the darkness, had not been paralysed, although himself had been stricken down, and lay despairing and helpless. So every good man finds it. What darkness to us, is not darkness to God. We cannot hear that thought of His presence, when we seem utterly lost, not able to find our hands to work, blinded by the dark perplexity of human things. He is a God afar off, "managing His great affairs," exalted too high to take our mean case into His hands. Our cheerful resignation, our heartfelt devotion to *Him*, comes back to us, in the time of great darkness and great helplessness, in the assurance of His presence *with us*. In the stress and fury of the battle is not the soldier animated by remembering that whatever his own fate, he is doing the command of his general? Every individual effort, every individual endurance, is part of the battle. The whole is in

hands of the trusted leader. He that planned all, confident of victory, commanded each action, knowing its worth in the glorious result. However little we understand God, and there are times when we are compelled, by the darkness of the shadow which has enveloped us, to cry, "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself!"—still, we can always say, "*Thou art with me.*" Thy knowledge, Thy righteousness, Thine unbaffled, unhindered, Providence,—they are none the less with me, and for me, though all seems concealed from my sight.

And, just in proportion as we lose self-will, watching and waiting upon God, shall we fearlessly face all possibilities of the future, feeling that He is *with us*. There seems to be special allusion to this guiding and ruling presence of our Saviour, in the pastoral phraseology which the Psalmist uses,—"*Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*" The shepherd's crook and staff were not so much weapons of defence against wild beasts, though they might be so employed, as instruments of his pastoral rule. He would lift up the sheep when fallen; take out the stones from the way; direct the wanderer when erring from the safe path; and when darkness came on, would sometimes, by the wise use of the crook or the staff, keep the timid creature on its feet, and help it over dreadful places, so that the darkness was made light. We can scarcely doubt that, in the mind of the royal singer, the two

offices of shepherd and king were mingling their associations together. He thought of the sheep not only as fed and watched, but also as ruled and governed. The shepherd's crook and staff were easily identified with the monarch's sceptre. And the life of each believer is glorified when it is seen in the light of God's throne. He is opening the way. He is clearing out the obstacles. He is striking down opposing enemies. His sceptre, which sways all things, guides His humblest servant, step by step, as a shepherd leads his sheep.

But David speaks of "*comfort*." It is one thing to believe that God is everywhere ruling and working after the counsel of His own will. It is another thing to be comforted by this belief, and so comforted that we can boldly say, looking onwards, "*I will fear no evil.*" Here, then, we reach the vital point in this ancient picty. What is the faith which makes the presence and power of God *comforting*? It is not difficult to answer the question. It is the faith which *seeks* God, as "the all in all," the "Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end." The sheep follows the Shepherd, feeling itself His own, to go with Him everywhere. Our dependence upon God is not the dependence of faith, except we feel that He is the highest object of our being; that our joyful existence is realised when we know that He is glorified in us. Such a faith, because it kisses the rod and the staff,



makes them comfort. To feel, when we can do nothing ourselves, "*He is with us*," how it speaks peace to the troublesome fears, and enables us to be passive in His guiding hand, until strength and resolution are restored to us! What extremity can be so dark, but we can, at least, feel the rod and the staff, if not see the countenance, of the Shepherd? What combination of dangers and sufferings can we imagine besetting us, where we can recognise no indications of the higher Will to which we have yielded ourselves? Yea, though the rod and staff sometimes themselves seem laid upon us chastisingly; though the Shepherd's voice speaks reproof, and tears of shame mingle with tears of sorrow; still, if with true faith our soul seeks Divine Love as its very element, we shall not only endure the chastening, but we shall welcome the gracious guidance. Every dark trouble is part of the preparation for the bright revelation of the future. He guides us on, now, with the rod and the staff; hereafter, He will gather us to Himself. Then, it will not be faith finding comfort in discipline, which will say, "*Thou art with me*;" it will be ecstatic fruition, gazing on the unveiled glory of His face. "Thou art with me!" "I am with Thee!" "This is the true God and Eternal Life!"

Surely, we cannot take up David's words without remembering that we who name the name of Jesus, are able to give them yet more vivid reality by

connecting them with the facts of the Gospel. "*Thou art with me!*" Thou, fellow-sufferer, touched with the feeling of my infirmities, and tempted in all points like as I am; Thou, my leader, the captain of my salvation, Thyself made perfect through the agonies of Calvary; Thou, who didst not hold back from the grave, but didst enter the valley of the shadow of death; who, in that mysterious darkness which covered Thy cross, didst wrestle with the powers of evil, and from Thy depth of suffering and shame cry out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Thou, Jesus, Immanuel, art with me! Have we not manifold witness of His presence? "*Thou art with me,*" exclaimed the dying penitent, as he hung by the side of Jesus on the cross. They were together in the shadow of death. The same day they were together in Paradise. "*Thou art with me,*" exclaimed the martyred Stephen, "behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God;" and, as the rushing enemies brought down the darkness of death upon him, the face of a present Saviour revealed itself,—“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” In the stormy Adriatic, for many days a ship is tossed with the tempest; “neither sun nor stars appeared;” “all hope that life should be saved was taken away.” One in that terrified company is fearless. Paul, the Apostle, has conversed face to face with the Angel of God. "*Thou art with me,*" "whose I am

and whom I serve," and "I will fear no evil." Alone, on the rocky Patmos, driven by the blast of persecution to the dreary solitude, the beloved disciple is rapt into heaven, and bathes in the light of the Golden City. The "bright and morning Star" has turned the darkness of the shadow of death into the light of His countenance. "*Thou art with me*," "Jesus, the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth!"

Have the ages which have intervened since Jesus removed from earth His visible presence, weakened the testimony? Has it become increasingly difficult to take up David's language of confidence, since Christ and His Apostles left the world? No! rather the Shepherd's rod and staff have been revealing themselves more and more fully and distinctly, in His gracious vouchsafements to His flock. David's Bible was a smaller light than ours. The Church of Christ, though blessed with miraculous signs and gifts in the early days of Christianity, lacked the privilege of developed experience and unfolded method bestowed upon these latter times. We walk in comparatively safe places. We walk by the help of Christian intercourse and appointed ordinances. The rod and the staff comfort us. We are seldom at a loss which way to go. If we reach a dark place where the shadow of death encompasses us, the testimony of fellow-believers in past times is ready for us in rich variety, helping us to recognise the divine guidance, helping us to know the

Shepherd's voice. Why are we ever dismayed? Why are we ever standing still, and ready to turn back "Perfect love casteth out fear."

We must all reach one spot, where the only real comfort will be to say to Jesus, "*Thou art with me!*" It is, indeed, a dreary place. We cannot say before hand what will be the dark facts which will then overshadow us. Bodily sufferings may have gathered together into their heaviest oppression. Faculties once full of activity and delight in their exercise, may be fettered in a gloomy prison-house of physical weakness. Friendly voices and friendly hands may be far away. The storm of death may sweep down upon us suddenly, and give us only a few minutes' preparation. We know not. We dare not anticipate. But this we do know,—the light of this world must be darkened; the joys of time must sink with us into the abyss; the terrible separation must come; a soul carried out into eternity; a world left behind; an unchangeable future realised!

Oh! surely, in the prospect of such an end to this life, we want a personal Saviour, perfectly loved, and all fear cast out. David's faith was rooted in his heart. He was the sheep rejoicing in the Shepherd's name, saying "He leadeth me." "I rejoice to be led. Let Him take me whithersoever He pleases." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."



THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

V.

THE FEAST OF BLESSEDNESS.

"THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES ; THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL ; MY CUP RUNNETH OVER."

Psalm, xxiii., 5.

THE Hand of the Shepherd is mighty to defend ; guiding safely through dangerous places ; holding up the failing strength ; even, "in the valley of the shadow of death," comforting by its sufficient and gracious rule. But David could speak of that Hand in yet another way which called out his glad praises. "Thou openest Thy hand," he could say, "and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Out of that hand of the Divine Shepherd came all good. One who, after many wonderful escapes, many sore trials, many deep humiliations, could look round upon regal glory, unbounded wealth, overflowing happiness, had, indeed, something to say about that hand of God,

which had not only held him safe, but had spread out before him a splendid feast of joy. At the height of his prosperity, David sung praise to Him out of whose fulness all his abundance had come. Very significantly the figure is changed, when the tone of the song is raised to a higher pitch. The sheep under the Shepherd's hand, gives us the idea of simple life : a weak creature, led and guarded in its defencelessness. But, though weakness and dependence still remain, naturally, David leaves them in the background when he strikes out a strain of ecstatic joy in his prosperity.

A sheep following the Shepherd ! Yes ! so I have been ; so I still am. But, here, before me, is a banquet of pleasures. I am a guest entertained by the King of Glory ; the hand of Him who has guided me and overshadowed me, has opened, and now ministers to all my wants, as His favoured and anointed one. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ; Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over."

We cannot disconnect such words from the material prosperity in which the Psalmist recognised the tokens of God's blessing. But we should do dishonour to the piety which breathes through the whole psalm, if we sought no higher application of its language. The Old Testament believers were accustomed to trace the hand of God in their external history, and it was a healthy religion which said, when my life is bright,

God smiles ; when it is dark, God hides His face. But the Old Testament believers were not, on that account, unspiritual men. All their allusions to material prosperity are connected with spiritual life. All the historical framework of their religious language seems to be penetrated with the soul's presence and experience. We can never forget, as we read David's Psalms, that the man himself, the immortal, spiritual, being, with his great feelings, and his still greater possibilities, is recording the divine discipline whereby he was being prepared for a nobler life. The facts of an earthly history became themselves vehicles of faith and hope. The devout mind could translate them easily into its own dialect. Because he was himself so little under the bondage of mere outward things, the inspired singer felt no call to append to every description of earthly blessedness its corresponding spiritual application.

At the same time, we who employ his words without being able to enter perfectly into the mental state from which they proceeded, cannot blend the material and the spiritual in the same manner. We must ask ourselves the direct question,—What do such words signify, as regards the soul? And, while we altogether abjure the spiritualising method of some, who would find special significance in every detail of a merely metaphorical representation, we would yet carefully seek the kernel of Spiritual Truth which is at

once hidden and preserved beneath the covering of material figures. A table prepared ; enemies watching, but restrained ; oil poured on the head of the guest, making him ready for the feast ; the cup of blessing filled to overflowing, and placed upon the table at the fitting opportunity ! All these are touches in a picture which, while it is earthly, is yet heavenly. There is a spiritual reality set forth by it. Let us, then, following out the leading truth of the whole Psalm, endeavour to put into words the suggestions of this verse,—“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over.”

Taking the whole as the description of a state of entire acceptance with God, vividly realised and rejoiced in, we may divide our consideration of the text into the following heads of thought.

I. GRACIOUS ANTICIPATION AND PREPARATION.
II. PERSONAL RECEPTION. III. CONSCIOUS POSSESSION OF SPIRITUAL FULNESS.

I. God's Grace *anticipates* our wants, and makes ready for us, according as He Himself purposes, and in spite of all that opposes. “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” That table to which we are invited, as the Good Shepherd leads us and we give ourselves to His loving care, is none other than the outspread fulness of joy which

there is in the fellowship between the creature and the Creator. When God made man, we are told He "planted a garden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." In that garden of delights an unfallen creature could not hide from his Creator. Every pleasure would be as the echo of that Voice which addressed him from heaven. Every hour of happy existence would be a gift from Him whose Hand was seen in all things, and whose Will opened out the future to him. Sin shut the gates of that Paradise, and drove out the man. But Grace brings back the same confidence of communion, the same environment of divine favour, the same simplicity of life, and it points to the glory of which Eden was only a type.

Even while we wait in a world of imperfection for "those things which God hath prepared for those who love Him," we can often adopt David's language on the acknowledgment of present gracious appointments. We know not, perhaps, even whither God is taking us. We only know that, day by day, as our path opens, so we are strengthened to continue. We are confident that it leads to some divinely appointed end. We are not curious to ascertain beforehand, either through what places we shall be taken, or what will be the climax. We know that there is an abundant reward to those that "endure unto the end." But He

takes us by surprise. We come out of darkness into light. We have only just left "the valley of the shadow of death," and, behold ! there is "a table" spread before us ; there are the threatening enemies all bound by divine bonds, and gnashing their teeth in impotent rage ; while the same Grace which has prepared the feast invites us to participate freely, fully with peaceful enjoyment.

Many sincere Christians are troubled with fears that they are not under the Shepherd's guidance, because they so seldom see the "table" before them. But, in the present time of our probation, is it not the demand of our faith that, not always, but only at fitting season and as He who knows the secrets of our spirits can appoint, we should sit down to a *feast* of religious emotions and heavenly foretastes ? We "are not yet come to the rest and to the inheritance." The effect of perpetual feeding on the richest food is a sickly nature. We find the table prepared for us when we find ourselves, by divine guidance, in the path of patient labour and conflict, brought to the place where we are prepared to sit down at the feast. There is a Grace anticipating and preparing. There is the thought which keeps us enduring and hoping. What wonder if we never lose altogether the sight of enemies ! Are we passing through the season of suffering ? Enemies in view will for a time hide from us the prospect of victory and peace. We fear that


"the joy of salvation" may never be restored. We cower under the darkening cloud. We cannot still the palpitating heart. But He shows us that all was divinely ordained. When we come out again into the bright, peaceful, place, we exclaim, with thankful surprise, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies!"

So, in the midst of the day's burden and heat, straining every nerve, conscious of little else than the present duty to be done, and its inexorable demands, what wonder that we see no feast spread out! Indeed, to be carried through the work, and to know that it is finished, is all our expectation. But once accomplished—a matter of retrospect, not of arduous toil—what a table is before us! We feast on the remembrance. The rest, both of the energies which have been strained and of the conscience which is satisfied, seems a divine banquet of peace.

In like manner is the inquirer after Truth rewarded. He must yield himself, it may be for a long season, to the Shepherd's guidance. He must patiently follow through rough places; through places of scanty provision; through places where dark doubts and torturing questionings will hang like a shadow of death over him; but his simple, trustful, earnestness will find, at last, a wealth of knowledge and assurance. He will acknowledge the Shepherd's Grace,—“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

Surely, whether it be the history of individuals, or the history of the whole Church of Christ, in which we seek for testimonies, we shall find them abundantly; they will all unite in one voice, praising that gracious Hand which, in spite of all fears and foes, has spread out the feast of joy. And, yet, the testimonies of the past are but prophecies of the future. There is a preparation which we cannot know until the end. At the table, "with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets;" with the outspread glories of the Everlasting Kingdom before us; with the enemies for ever vanquished, for ever excluded; beholding that which Eternal Love devised, which Almighty Sufficiency accomplished; in the full brightness of that Light which shall flood the scene from the countenance of God,—transfigured ourselves into the image of Him whose presence we feel our highest happiness; *then*, we shall know what Grace has done. And in the expectation of that end we sing, by faith,—
 "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies!"

2. *Personal reception* is acknowledged. "Thou anointest my head with oil." The first and simplest reference of these words must be to the customary anointing at feasts. In Eastern lands anointing had a double signification. As offered by the host to his guests, it was an expression of entire welcome to his



hospitality. As immediately connected with the meal which it preceded, it was regarded as a personal preparation for the better enjoyment of food, refreshing and invigorating the frame, which in a hot climate is liable to a lassitude injurious to appetite. There is no necessity to go further than these ordinary significations in seeking the meaning of David's words. We can scarcely suppose that he is making allusion to official consecration, or that if his own anointing as king was in his thoughts, he would speak of it in any other sense than as an illustration of Divine Grace. Rather, he is losing all thought of official distinction by identifying himself with God's people. The King invites the guests to His prepared table. David is one of them. A place is kept for him. He who makes the feast welcomes the guest, and gives him, by His Grace, preparation for the blessings provided. "Thou anointest my head with oil."

This twofold anointing every believer knows. First, there is that immediate, personal, expression of favour, which may be compared to the host's anointing of his guests before the outspread table. The Grace of God, as the work of His redeeming love on behalf of all mankind, does not wait for its manifestations until sinners are brought into immediate contact with salvation. The table is spread, though the guests are not arrived. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Remaining still impenitent, the glorious

announcements and attractions of Redemption surround men. They hear and see, and sometimes feel, the nearness of Gospel blessings, long before they taste and enjoy them. But in every Christian experience, there is a work corresponding to that which David acknowledges. He is conscious of such a union with God through faith in Christ, such a personal application of Grace, that from that time he participates, really, vividly, of those new things which belong to the spiritual life. It may be difficult to say whether such a state of mind corresponds to what is sometimes called assurance. It may be quite distinct and it may be connected with abundant external evidences of a new life, and, yet, to the person himself, it may seem to fall short of assurance. "Lord, I believe," cried the troubled father, "help Thou mine unbelief." Looking outwards, we express faith; looking inwards, we confess doubt. We may be conscious, at the same time, of the new and of the old; of the Shepherd with us; of ourselves still unworthy of the Shepherd's presence. But the one great distinguishing fact of a Christian's experience is this,—He who has prepared great things for him has prepared him for greatness, by taking him into personal favour, laying His hand of benediction upon him, introducing him to the fulness of His table. "Thou anointest my head with oil."

Such a personal reception is accompanied by

subjective change. The oil of anointing at once strengthens and gladdens. The new mind and heart is the preparation for the new heavenly bestowments. Astonishing, indeed, is the work of Grace, in thus preparing us for that which is placed before us in Christian life. David knew it well. How thankfully he acknowledges that the word and the ways of God had become to his taste, as he 'meditated on them, "more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb!" The appetite for spiritual things springs up within. The book which was old and dull, becomes the cherished daily companion. The ordinances, which were always too many and too long, make the soul young again with new pleasure. The "works of faith and labours of love," are a "light yoke" and an "easy burden." We "were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the shepherd and bishop of our souls." Weary, defiled by our sins, borne down by the weight of our own vain thoughts, we had no desire for anything better; we had no strength to lay hold of the blessed opportunities before us continually. But by the Grace of God, at once declaring us welcome to the feast, and filling us with the inward appetite and ability to enjoy it, we "are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." David's acknowledgment is ours,—“Thou anointest my head with oil.”

3. The concluding words of the text seem to carry out still further the leading thought of participation in a prepared feast, and by a single touch set before the idea of full enjoyment. "My cup runneth over." As with the cup, so with all that is prepared: it is overflowing abundance. David, therefore, sings of his happiness as the conscious possessor of gracious gifts. Again let us remember, that Old Testament saints looked upon blessings of earthly life, as well as those more distinctly connected with religion,* as put by the gracious God in their cup. David could not have his happiness overflowing, had he not seen in all his joys an outpoured love of God. His life was a draught of divine favour. Must we, then, look for a corresponding acknowledgment among those whose cup of earthly good overflows, and not among such who know privation and scant pleasures of this life? We should miss some of the gladdest songs if we did. It is not the Grace of God, not only sufficient to banish complaint, but able to turn the darkness into day. The soul is the real guest. The soul's banquet is real happiness.

No miraculous exception need be sought, but frequent are the illustrations of the overcoming glory of the spiritual life. Many a poor man's bare walls are plain fare, because his heart swells with glad feelings in the enjoyment of his religion, instead of oppressing him with a sense of his poverty, seem rather to lift him

up into a higher appreciation of his spiritual wealth. While, on the other hand, luxury and ease in outward life but too commonly rob the heart of its own joys, make the mind dull and inactive; hide, by a false glitter, the pure brightness of religious realities.

Undoubtedly, those that drink much of the cup of sorrow, generally speaking, drink most thankfully of the cup of gladness. Those who, to the onlookers, seem to have least, may, by the gracious fulness of their hearts, seem to themselves to have most. "Delight thyself in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

However it be in the circumstances of our earthly life, there is one acknowledgment which every Christian can make,—"*My cup of salvation runneth over.*" There may be times when, through the depressing influence of fears which an enemy stirs up, we cannot drink large draughts of comfort from the cup. We are almost afraid to look forward. We dare not speak confidently. The precious words which have been sent us, to give us a foretaste of heaven, sound strange and cold. We cannot rise above the cloud of our own insignificance and sinfulness. But the cup is not emptied by our doubt. It is full as ever. Jesus, the Saviour, has prepared it, and it "runneth over," with divine sufficiency and comfort. We shall enjoy it again. He who has led us to the feast, who has anointed us with His acceptance and

His sanctifying Spirit, will not "forsake the work of His own hands." And, however it be with us while "in this tabernacle," though we but seldom greatly rejoice still, let us look forward. The same Hand which deals so graciously with us now, will spread the heavenly table, and prepare us for a place at that everlasting feast. When we sit down there, we shall be conscious of no hindrance from our own infirmity. A mistrusting heart will not remove the heavenly viands away from us; a sickly appetite will not leave them untouched; a mean capacity will not be contented with a poor participation.

Oh! surely, awaking in the likeness of God, "we shall be satisfied." In the midst of "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore," "eating of angels' food drinking of "the river of the water of life, in the Paradise of God," we shall lift up a new song of praise, and strike the golden harp, before the throne of God and of the Lamb in adoring exultation! "My cup runneth over!" "Blessed," indeed, "are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. See that ye have and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."



THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

VI.

THE FOLDING LOVE.

"SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME
ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE: AND I WILL DWELL IN
THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER."

Psalm, xxiii., 6.

JUST about to lay down his harp and finish his song of praise, David strikes out one more strain, still sustaining the same lovely melody, and leaving us with a last full outburst of sweetness, which seems to float on into the infinite distance. Arrived at the concluding words of the Psalm, it seems necessary to call together in our recollection, what those successive impressions have been which each preceding verse has made in its turn, and thus with the Psalm fresh in our minds, we shall the better appreciate what seems to be the climax and resting place of David's faith and piety.

Feeling quite sure that God was the object of his heart's delight, his dearest as well as his greatest

companion, David sings this song to cheer and strengthen both himself and his fellow-believers. He describes his relation to God, and God's character and method in dealing with him, not in cold, abstract grandiloquence, but in simple, natural, familiar language, such as his own actual condition on earth, his felt necessities and future liabilities, immediately suggested. Without trying to grasp the mystery of God's government, and pass a mortal's judgment on the ways of Him who is past finding out, he thinks,—Here am I, a helpless, wandering, sheep. I want food and shelter; I want the safety of the fold. I want the kindly vigilance and the patient nurture of One who is not, like myself, exposed to the dangers, and liable to destruction; above me, while with me; full of those blessings which I feel myself to lack, while yet full of them on my account and for my sake. The Lord is my Creator; the Lord is my Judge; the Lord is my object of Fear and Worship. But, blessed be His name, He has spoken to my heart; He has found me weak, wilful, wandering, and revealed His redeeming and saving love, and, now, I can say, I can sing, out of my happy confidence and sweetness of hope, "The Lord is my shepherd!"

We have seen how, with this delightful truth, fully believed and fully rejoiced in, David went on to speak the language of his pious praise. He thought of his weariness and fainting, in the dry and barren places

of this evil world ; he thought of his own inherent emptiness, and the scorching, withering, troubles which came upon him from time to time ; but, then, looking out from himself to the Lord, he said,—“ I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters ! ”

David remembered that sometimes such was the burden of the flesh, or such the fierceness of assailing temptations, existence itself was imperilled. He scarcely knew whether he would ever be able to find strength again, or lift up his head out of such depths ; but he looked out again, from himself, and his past history, to the Lord, and he said,—“ He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake ! ”

But is anything already endured, a criterion for the future ? What if the very blackness of death be upon me ? What if I seem walking into the very jaws of hell ? What if my mind should give way, if imagination, turning traitor, should people my path with horrors ; what if all the legions of my foes should seem to be gathering to oppose my progress, and daring me to keep the way ? Have I provision for such an extremity ? Dare I trust that, even when “ flesh and heart fail,” the Lord will be found “ my portion ? ” “ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me ! ”

And so, as if already emerged out of such a darkness, and come forth into pleasant, peaceful, daylight, David sees himself as a favourite of the Lord, at the divine banqueting table ; feasting on rich provision ; drinking of the cup of celestial joys ; meetened, by the Lord's anointing, for the highest benefits and blessings appointed him, and that in the very presence of his enemies, who sought after his soul to destroy it, but have all been vanquished by the Lord—the world, the flesh, and the devil, all made harmless and silent ! “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over !”

And what, then, is the end of such thoughts, but a new, permanent, assurance in which he shall try to rest his soul, and in the strength of which he will go out to the battle of life ? Away with all worthless reasonings ! Away with all faithless murmurs ! Away with all wicked doubts ! Away with all cowardly despondency ! Let me be strong in this Grace which is in the Lord my Shepherd, for,—“*Surely* goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever !”

Now, as this is the *sure foundation* on which David henceforth stands, it will be well for us again to examine it, and see how good it is ; and then consider, before leaving the subject, how we ourselves can arrive at the same confidence, and feel as sure as he.

The first half of this verse, you will notice, declares the certainty of Divine faithfulness and love. The second half, the certainty of the believer's perseverance, safety, and peace. Of course, it was not meant to separate these two sides of our confidence, as though they proceeded from different sources, for unless we recognise their inseparable union, we can never be sure at all. But it is helpful to our understanding the truth to make the distinction. On the one hand, we accept simply and implicitly the promises of God's Word, and, therefore, we believe that, "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life!*" And, then, on the other hand, in addition to that simple acceptance of promises, we are conscious of a real work of Grace in our own souls and in our whole existence, and, so, without deriving our confidence *from* ourselves, but still looking for the gracious assurance of God *in* ourselves, not only in the words that He has spoken, but also in personal experience and individual life, we say,—"*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*"

1. The first part of David's assurance, then, was the Divine character, works, and words,—"*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*" That idea of *following* each individual man in the path of his footsteps, is, of necessity, in the thought of a Divine Being. If we think of God as intelligent

creatures are compelled to think of Him, even to the demands of reason, to say nothing of a high teaching, then we must believe that he follows close upon us at all times, however intricate the windings of our way, however lost to ourselves the clue by which we shall come forth. He follows with an Omniscient Eye! He follows with an Almighty Hand! He follows with an Infinite Righteousness, exposing at every step the sinner's distance from the holy and the good. The word which David uses in this verse is precisely the same which would be used, were he speaking of an enemy's pursuit. He was thinking, no doubt, of the closeness with which an Almighty Being pressed upon him; how, in His all-pervading government of the world, He made every minutest fact of life subservient to His purpose; how the food he ate, the air he breathed, the ground he walked upon, the fellow-creatures with whom he conversed and dealt,—all that was interwoven into the texture of his daily existence, was in the hand of God; so that, in a moment, He could cut any thread, He could change any part of the pattern, He could brake up and destroy the whole. Is there not unspeakable solemnity in that truth? Can we bear to think of such near following, and, if it were, pursuing of God, except we do well understand both His character and His purposes; except we can feel quite confident that nothing in Him is seeking to hurt or misery?

Now, this great and good man of old did *believe* that, whatever might appear to the contrary, whatever misgivings, at times, might be stored up in our own mind, "*goodness and mercy*" would follow him all the days of his life. He was determined to see, in Him whom he called his Shepherd, only "*goodness and mercy*." And, yet, the very words which he uses, "*all the days of my life*," reminds us how difficult it is to feel that same assurance. "*Days of my life!*" Do we forget that day when a sudden stroke seemed, as it were, to blot out the very sun from the heavens, and we groped in a darkness that might be felt? Do we forget that day when we almost cursed the hour of our birth; when we loathed life itself; when we were ready to fling up our angry accusation at the face of God, however little way it would reach, and however sure it was to fall back upon ourselves? The day of cruel suspense! The day of bitter disappointment! The day of torturing agony! The day of paralysing terror! We must reckon all these, and many more strange and black letter days, into the calendar of life. Can we say, with the same confidence as David, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me *all the days of my life?*" We want two things before it is possible. We want the full persuasion that "*goodness and mercy*" always are meant, not only in general, but in particular; not only in the character of God, but in His actual dealings with us; and we want, beyond this, the

power to quell all rising contradiction within us—th power quietly, and submissively, and silently to wai until the “*the goodness and mercy*” reveal themselves.

Now, whoever understands at all what human natur is, and what life is sure to be, will immediately acknow ledge that such wants can be supplied only by th Grace of God ; only through vital change. We ma talk about Divine Benevolence, the Fatherhood o God, the Wisdom of Providence ; but nothing wi prepare us for the “*days of our life,*” except such faith as we find in these words of the Psalms. W must see the “goodness and mercy,” in its relation t our sins, our helplessness, our proneness to wande In other words, we must see it in the Saviour, Jesu Christ. There it is “goodness and mercy” forgivin us all the past ; restoring us out of misery ; pledgin with all the solemnity of an Infinite oath, an etern happiness, a perfect security ! Oh ! when we lift u our eyes from the dust, and look on that bleedin Victim, offered in our behalf, and see there, in th expiation of that cross, the Will of the Father : heaven, “the brightness of that Father’s glory and th express image of His person,” *then*, indeed, though w look forward to days of dark trial, days of sad offence days of prostrate feebleness, days of terrible dange we still feel able to say,—“Surely goodness and merc shall follow me all the days of my life !”

Let us interpret these words a little more explicitl

in accordance with the more advanced revelation of the New Testament. When we sing of the Lord our Shepherd, we think, as Christians, of the presence and care of the Lord Jesus. And these words by which David describes divine guardianship and favour—*“goodness and mercy”*—find their fullest and most vital meaning to Christians only as they see them in their Saviour. Now, is it not an essential part of our faith, that the good and merciful Jesus is really one with His people? We think of Him, not alone as following in the sense of accompanying our steps, but as communicating His *goodness* to His people, and making them to live in the very midst of His *mercy*. The days of my life, if I am really Christ's, are days of spiritual growth, advancement in the direction of my glorious, eternal, destiny; and it is my participation of the Saviour's spirit, present with me, working in me, helping my infirmities, and fashioning my being, which carries me forward. The Apostle Paul was rejoicing in this goodness and mercy following him, from day to day, when he said, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are

eternal." The goodness and mercy of Jesus are "things not seen." We cannot see them, because they are "spiritually discerned." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But, believing in a present Saviour to whom we are livingly joined, we do look away from the things seen and temporal, and we try to see all the facts of this lower life in the light of that goodness and mercy. Here is my wickedness calling for punishment, but *here* is the goodness of Jesus pleading in my behalf! Here is my perishing body dragging me down to the grave; but *here* is the goodness of the Son of God declaring immortality already purchased and secured! Here is an evil world and an evil spirit both against me, not on some of my worst days, but every day, and, at times, a host of enemies encamping against me, the weapons flashing in the hands of "ten thousands of the people that have set themselves against me round about;" but *here* is unchangeable mercy in the King of Glory—the Lord of Hosts, the Lord mighty in battle! He gave Himself *for* me; He gave Himself *to* me. He has come and revealed Himself my daily companion. He is pledged, by the price of Calvary, never to leave me, never to forsake me. I have His promise,—he that believeth in the goodness and mercy of Christ shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck him out of His hand

"Surely," *that* "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life!"

2. Passing on now to the latter half of this verse, we find in it, as was said before, another side of the believer's assurance, which respects more particularly his own perseverance and peace. "*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*" David says, "*I will*," not "*I shall*." But he meant not, I think, to speak in the spirit of self-confidence. If his "*I will*" was the boast of a strong determination, it appears just as inappropriate as "*I shall*," used in the sense of positive prediction. He meant neither to glory in his own resolutions and intentions, nor to proclaim his perfect knowledge of the future; but, with a child-like forgetfulness of himself, to declare his joyful and confident acceptance of the Grace of God. Here was the house of the Lord opened to him to dwell in, and to dwell in for ever. "*I will dwell in it*," he cried, "I choose it; I rejoice in it; I give myself eternally to its keeping."

It will be necessary, however, in explaining these words, to rid ourselves, as much as possible, of narrow, conventional, meanings attached to that familiar expression,—"*The house of the Lord.*" The Psalmist was not thinking of any material structure, with its peculiar services, and its appointed seasons of opportunity. As a matter of fact, he could not dwell always in the visible temple, even had he referred only to the present

life. We should feel it an inadequate and disappointing conclusion to his psalm, if he spoke only of enjoying opportunities of worship ; presenting before God "outward and visible signs" of his faith, and receiving tokens of favour from heaven. I am inclined to think that the term *house* is employed, in this instance, in the simplest and nearest sense of dwelling place and home. It is the place where the *table* is spread, of which he has just been speaking ; the house where he is kept and fed ; where he lives within the light of the Father's countenance ; where he is counted one of the Father's family ; where he holds sweet fellowship with other members of the Father's household ; where his appointed service is rendered, and his faithful reward is bestowed ; where he peacefully rests and joyfully grows ! Our Saviour takes up the figure, and consecrates it still more by His own employment,—“In my Father's *house* are many mansions ; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a *place for you*.” His apostles took it up in unfolding more fully the message of His love. “Christ,” says the sacred writer, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, “is faithful as a son over His own *house*. Whose *house* are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” “Now, therefore,” says St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, “ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the *household* of God.”

At the same time, while this thought of a home and a family was present to the Psalmist's mind, we cannot doubt that the revelation of God in the "visible signs" of the old dispensation prompted his language. He did not think of God's house in which he should dwell for ever, as at all worthily set forth by *his own* imperfect house. He saw in the beauties and solemnities of the Temple foreshadowings of that holy splendour, that heavenly peace and purity, that harmonious joy and divine exaltation, in which he should abide with God. *There was the Throne*—a seat of mercy—unspeakably glorious, but still accessible to man; *there was the Altar*, where the thankful gifts were laid, and whence the humble offering of the worshippers were taken into the presence of Jehovah; *there* he joined the throng of the *consecrated people*, and mingled in the ecstatic music of their praise, or in the solemn voice of their supplication. How delightful, then, to blend together in one the familiarity of home and the glory of that Divine Palace! All that the Temple set forth, combined with the sweetness and simplicity of the place endeared by the closest ties and the most touching associations of family life! "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!"

Ah! what new meaning is put into such a word as this, when the Lord takes one and another out of *our earthly house*, and places them in *His hidden, heavenly, one*! We miss them *here*, but we know that they are

there! We would not, if we could, bring them back, to take their places in the midst of so much that is faulty, painful, and dull; but what a thought it is,—We and they, for ever, dwelling at home with God! Truly, *this* is not our home—we “have no continuing city here; but we seek one that is to come.” Blessed be God, if He draws our hearts after Himself, even though it be by first taking *to* Himself the joys of our house on earth!

But, I have said that this language of David's is the language of assurance, in regard to his own position and perseverance. Let us consider for a moment, what that assurance is. It was the assurance of a felt *relationship to God*. By gracious teaching, we come to realise this new relationship as a fact testified within us. Not that David, or any other truly humble child of God, found his confidence in the mere presence of happy feelings; but that *faith* said, “I am accepted and blessed of God,” because faith received God's declaration that it was so. Suppose that, for some bad purpose, an evil-minded person should whisper in the ears of our child, that he is not really our child, but belongs to some other house. Unable to satisfy itself by thinking and reasoning, the child at last comes to its father, and asks for *assurance*. The father's word is enough; he believes it simply and entirely. And, yet, though believing it, and shutting his ears to the lying voice without, there may be moments when the



remembrance of that doubt may come in to disturb his peace. He would not like to be obliged to trust his own feelings. But he possesses the positive declaration of the father; he takes it to heart; he rests upon it; he finds in it fulness of joy! Now, when we say, with David, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," our assurance is this,—We believe that God has declared us His children in Jesus Christ. We feel, in accordance with that faith, that we are children. We believe that in His house we shall always abide.

And let us notice in the words of the Psalmist, that assurance was the fruit of devotedness. He could say "*I will*," with so much confidence, because he renounced all other ends. He gave himself, fully and unreservedly, to that to which God's Grace invited him. Is not his language just what we should expect of one who is possessed with the idea of perseverance and final acceptance, because he cannot bear to think of anything else. The house of the Lord only for a time! No, it must be *for ever*! God helping me, it *shall* be for ever! Be silent, thou doubting heart! Keep at a distance, ye blinding fears! The Lord opens to me the prospect of eternal companionship with Him. I am invited to look down the long vista of successive glories, and see it an interminable progress. I will suffer no cloud henceforth to conceal that revelation. I will go through the toils and trials of earth with that wondrous

future always before me. I will “press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” For I have received “the Spirit of adoption which “beareth witness with my spirit that I am a child of God ; and if a child, then an heir, an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ.” “Surely, then, “goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever !”

Before concluding this subject, let us inquire again and more directly, how that blessed “*surely*” can be ours as well as David’s. *Hope* is entertained by almost all who listen to the Gospel ; but a hope without a sure foundation is but the *ignis fatuus*—the mocking light—of a corrupt heart, deceiving us into destruction. No immortal, accountable, creature, ought to be satisfied with his state, except he can say “*surely*,” as David said it, not out of a boastful assertion of himself, but out of a child-like dependence upon God.

Let us remember, then, that the first requisite to such an assurance, is the looking away from ourselves to the fulness of God’s Grace in the Saviour. Even the heathen centurion, full of Roman pride and worldly indifference, when he saw *that* sight,—Jesus patiently enduring the agony and shame, God the Father testifying His acceptance of the sacrifice by the marvellous signs which accompanied the crucifixion—cried

out, "Truly this was the Son of God!" And is not the one sole reason of our unbelief, or of our dumb indifference, that we have not yet lifted up our eyes to the Cross, and beheld that "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world?" You want to be able to say,—*Surely* my sins are forgiven; *surely* my heart is changed; *surely* I shall not go back into the world. And, still, you are only looking downwards; searching for encouragement among those human and earthly things which are all that you will ever find by such a method! Has not the Cross said, "*surely*?" Was not Jesus "set forth crucified among us," that "we might have a *strong consolation* who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us?" Before we can speak assurance from ourselves, we must hear it from God. *Our* "*surely*," must only be the echo of *His*. He says, in that dying Jesus of Nazareth, and in that risen and glorified Christ,—"*Surely* blessing I will bless thee," "I will put my laws into your hearts, and in your minds will I write them, and your sins and iniquities will I remember no more?"

"Your ransom and peace,
Your surety He is,
Come, see if there ever was sorrow like His."

Oh! let us seek assurance that that Saviour is ours, by looking unto Him believingly, devotedly, with perfect forgetfulness of the past, and with eternal consecration of the future, and then we shall find grace to

say,—“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

But this beautiful language of confidence came from David after years of trial, and a long course of faithful service. Let us not be discouraged, if we find, at first, that such words are too great for us ; but let us work in the name of Christ, and suffer patiently, that that Name may be glorified ; and, then, no doubt, the assurance will come. The normal state of a Christian is that in which he is too busy to doubt, too humble to think of anything but Christ's words, and the enjoyment of Christ's love. Let us take all our gloomy misgivings as the signs of infirmity and ill-health, and let us go forth into the fresh, invigorating, renewing, influence of cheerful activity, that our pulses may beat higher with intensity of feeling and our energies grow greater with more strenuous endeavour. The Spirit of Life will then abide within us. “The God of Peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, will make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ ;” and, then, being “washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,” we shall find strength to say,—“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”



THE THRONE OF GOD.

I.

ISAIAH'S VISION.

"IN THE YEAR THAT KING UZZIAH DIED I SAW ALSO THE LORD SITTING UPON A THRONE, HIGH AND LIFTED UP, AND HIS TRAIN FILLED THE TEMPLE. ABOVE IT STOOD THE SERAPHIMS: EACH ONE HAD SIX WINGS; WITH TWAIN HE COVERED HIS FACE, AND WITH TWAIN HE COVERED HIS FEET, AND WITH TWAIN HE DID FLY. AND ONE CRIED OUT UNTO ANOTHER, AND SAID, HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, IS THE LORD OF HOSTS: THE WHOLE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS GLORY. AND THE POSTS OF THE DOOR MOVED AT THE VOICE OF HIM THAT CRIED, AND THE HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH SMOKE."—Isaiah, vi., 1-4.

THE people of Judah had become formal, hypocritical, spiritually dead amongst signs and words of life. The Temple bore witness still to Him in whose name it was erected; but it was a witness against those who frequented it. Priestly sacrifices,

services, holy things, holy times, holy places,—all were still preserved ; but the people themselves were not a holy people. How God viewed their state, the Prophet Isaiah has told us in the opening words of his prophecy. In their solemn meeting there was iniquity ; their oblations were vain ; their incense was abomination ; their hands were unclean ; their feet were pollution to the place they trod. " Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters : they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward." In such a state of society, to be a messenger of God required no small amount of courage. Who would take upon himself the office of prophet ? Who could bear the burden of such an office, except as he knew himself commissioned from above ? Isaiah opens the secret of his confidence. He fetched it from God's throne. His lips had been touched by one of the seraphims with a live coal from the altar in the heavenly temple.

A prophet, under the old dispensation, was generally appointed to the special work of arousing a slumbering people to repentance and newness of life. Already, during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, Isaiah, the son of Amoz, had for a short season exercised the prophetic office. Experience soon taught him the hardness of the deceived heart, the loneliness of the faithful

preacher ; the weariness of a work whose fruits must be gathered after long and painful toil ; perhaps only by those who enter into the labourer's sphere when he himself is gone. But, though burdened by the sense of his own insufficiency, he was not despondent, he was not disobedient. Sick at heart in the wretched monotony of corruption by which he found himself everywhere surrounded among the people, he sought refreshment in the Temple, at Jerusalem. Standing in the outer courts, and looking through the gate into the holy place, towards the veil which hid the glorious secrets of the inner sanctuary, his eye took in at once the grand features of the building, the aspect of the worshippers, and the prominent characteristics of the service. It was the true test of the national religion, for there it was seen in its central and most authoritative expression. Hollow-hearted priests were surrounded by the vain and the time-serving, who were blindly following their spiritual leaders, without thought, without reverence, without feeling. All seemed to the prophet like some heathen incantation-scene around hideous idols, rather than the comely service of Jehovah. His heart swelled with holy indignation and jealousy for the Lord of hosts. His eyes were raised, as though to lose the sight which defiled the earth, and find relief in the thought of heaven. In an ecstasy of spiritual vision, the scene changed. The material temple became the Celestial Palace, to which it

had often directed his desires. The veil was gone. The glorious Mercy-seat was before him. The invisible Jehovah was amidst the countless hosts of His pure worshippers. He saw the outspread wings, white as the driven snow, forming a mighty canopy above the sunlike splendour in the midst. The voice of thunder rolled around his head, and the air seemed to fill with the smoke of incense. The ground trembled beneath his feet, the gorgeous pillars shook, while through the myriads of angelic beings the cry was heard shouted from rank to rank, with endless reverberation,—“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of His glory !”

Isaiah's vision of the throne of God was vouchsafed him, “in the year that King Uzziah died.” A long and prosperous reign closed in gloom. Uzziah was a monarch of great military prowess and administrative ability. Under him Judah gained victories over the Edomites and Philistines, and the trans-Jordanic tribes; Jerusalem was fortified ; and an army of three hundred thousand men was thoroughly prepared with warlike equipment. The country was filled with prosperity. The people were encouraged to a life of industry. But Uzziah, like many another successful man, became uplifted with sinful pride; attempted to burn incense on the altar of God, in defiance of the High Priest Azariah and eighty others, who withstood him ; was smitten by God with leprosy while

he stood with the censer in his hand ; and finished his reign an outcast from his own people, a leper unto the day of his death. Jotham, the son and successor of Uzziah, ruled, as regent of the kingdom, during the years of his father's leprosy. He was a man of much inferior energy, though not badly disposed.

"The year that King Uzziah died," would naturally be a time of critical importance to the mind of the prophet. As yet, "the high places were not removed." Prosperity and material aggrandisement blinded the people to their religious deficiencies. Would the young King Jotham aid the cause of religious reformation, or would he, like his predecessor, devote himself to mere worldly success ? As yet, idolatry had not been actually brought into the temple of God. As yet, Syrians and Assyrians had not been sent forth on their errands of Divine vengeance. But the nation seemed to be ripening for judgment. Isaiah's vision was intended both for the prophet himself, and for the people to whom he was sent. *For him*, that he might be inspired with holy confidence, and feel himself like an angel sent from the throne of God, swift to fulfil his mission, humble to wait on the Holy One ; *for them*, that they might remember whose throne is high over all, whose glory must fill the whole earth.

Let us, now, consider the vision itself, and its

practical meaning as holding a place in the book of Divine Revelation.

1. The central object in the prophet's vision was the Throne of God, with its Divine Occupant. "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." The Divine Person is named in the Hebrew text "*Adonai*." This word may be said to be exactly corresponding to "*Jehovah*." The Jews, in many cases, when they found the name "*Jehovah*" in a sacred book, from a superstitious feeling lest it should be irreverently pronounced, substituted the word "*Adonai*." The vowels of the word "*Jehovah*" were adopted from "*Adonai*." Whether the prophet originally wrote "*Jehovah*" or "*Adonai*," therefore, signifies little, as we cannot doubt the person indicated is the same. *Jehovah* or *Adonai* was the name of Him who revealed Himself to man,—“The Almighty, True, Personal, Holy, Being,” a Spirit, and “the Father of spirits ;” who made a covenant with His people, and became their Lawgiver, and to whom all honour and worship are due.”

A remarkable reference to Isaiah's vision occurs in the New Testament, in the twelfth chapter of St. John's Gospel. The Jews who listened to the Lord Jesus Christ, and saw His miracles, “could not believe, because that Isaiah said, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts ; that they should not see

with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things, said Isaiah, when He saw His glory and spake of Him." (John, xii., 39-41) If the light of the New Testament should be thrown upon the language of the Old, in order to explain it, then we cannot resist the conclusion that the Apostle John was divinely directed to identify the Jehovah of Isaiah's vision with the Lord Jesus Christ. He plainly alludes to the tenth verse of the chapter in which the prophet's vision is recorded,—“Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.” The glory, therefore, which the apostle declares was the glory of Jesus Christ, and which was seen by Isaiah at the time that he was commissioned to speak such words to the people, was the glory which appeared in the Temple when Jehovah was revealed to the prophet, “sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.” The God of the Hebrews was a God known and loved by His people; their Saviour, their Lawgiver, their Leader, their Guide unto death, and their Portion for ever and ever. The history of Jesus is the history of Immanuel, “God with us.” “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son,—the

brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person."

The Lord appeared "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." The Jewish temple represented the palace of the King of kings. The innermost chamber—the holy of holies—into which the high priest alone entered, once a year, set forth the more immediate presence of God, in the Mercy-seat above the Ark of the Covenant, overshadowed by the wings of the "cherubims of glory." It was a very ancient tradition among the Jews, that in the midst between the cherubims, and, therefore, immediately upon the mercy seat itself, there was visible a bright light, or a cloud as if veiling an insupportable splendour. And in later times, they named this appearance the "*Shekinah*." The Scripture certainly speaks of a "glory of the Lord filling the house of the Lord, so that the priest could not stand and minister because of the cloud," on the occasion of the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kings, viii., 2.) A cloud of glory, too, led the Israelites through the wilderness, which was regarded as the sign of Jehovah's presence. The allusions to such a visible glory of God are frequent, both in the Old Testament and in the New. But we are not warranted in concluding that the sign was permanently given. We may rather connect it with special occasions of divine communication, when the minds of the people needed the assistance of a visible appearance

to quicken their thoughts and deepen their feeling of reverence. The word "*Shekinah*," which the Jews applied to this glorious manifestation, conveys the idea of a permanent dwelling of God amongst His people ; but it is a word not found in the Bible, and first occurs in the Targums. The Scriptures did not teach that the presence of God was attached to the material temple ; but, distinctly separated the idea of that presence, and its glory, from the visible emblems. God came and revealed Himself when it pleased Him. The people knew that they might keep their temple, and still lose its glory.

Isaiah, then, saw in his vision, not an abiding *Shekinah*—a mere fixed sign belonging to the temple, and passing away with the temple ; but the Lord Himself, appearing to him, as He appeared to patriarchs, and to Moses,—a living Person, whose face, indeed, was more glorious than man's, and whose voice rolled as thunder around him, but who called him into colloquy with Himself. "High and lifted up" was His Throne. It was not the material mercy-seat on the ark which the prophet saw. It was a throne high above all earthly things, rising up into the heavens. The voice of God, in Isaiah's heart, said then, as afterwards it proclaimed to his ear, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." Was He not the Omnipotent Ruler ; could any hide themselves from Him ; could He be satisfied with a heartless

worship; would He leave a hypocritical service unpunished? As Isaiah looked upon that lofty throne, and bowed himself before the majesty of Him whose glory shone forth from the height, he seemed to hear the ancient words re-echoed,—“The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children unto the third and to the fourth generation.” Flowing down from the high and lifted up throne was the train of the Royal robes, and “it filled the temple.” Instead of the vain, worldly-minded, crowd, gathered about the irreligious priests, Isaiah saw the glory of the Divine Righteousness, as it were, filling “the new heavens and the new earth.” However little the righteousness of God is acknowledged by the thrones of this world, and in the temples made with hands, He whose glory Isaiah saw, “the King’s Son,” to whom “the judgments of God” and His “righteousness” shall be given, shall at last appear upon a throne “high and lifted up.” Then, the robes of His majesty shall flow down through all the kingdoms of this world. Many an unrighteous sceptre must be broken, many a polluted temple must crumble into ruins, many a desecrating priesthood must be swept out of the holy place by that glory of

the Lord. But, let us be thankful, the Throne, "*high and lifted up*," is also the Mercy-seat. "And men shall be blessed in Him, all nations shall call Him blessed!"

2. Next in the prophet's vision we find a description of those who, as the favoured attendants, surrounded the glorious Throne. "Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." The seraphims are mentioned only in this place in the Scripture. We cannot doubt that the term denotes angelic spirits. There has been some controversy as to the exact meaning of the word: some, as the Jewish commentators in the Targum, making it signify only "holy ministers;" others rendering it "noble ones;" but the majority of learned men acquiesce in the familiar interpretation, "burning ones," deriving it from a Hebrew root signifying "to burn." The idea of the name is certainly that of combined power and glory, heat and light. Angels appeared in flames of fire, and again disappeared in them. God "maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire." Such bright, powerful, angels were seen by the prophet standing above the throne, or above the place on which the throne was set, rising in corresponding ranks on each side the steps ascending to the Royal seat, until they over-

shadowed the Divine Person in the centre. Borne up by their wings, they seemed as if standing erect and ready instantly to obey the commands of Him before whom they waited. They had six wings. Two covered their faces, to protect them from the insufferable brightness of Jehovah's countenance. Two covered their feet, probably to denote that their work in performing the commissions of God was secret and unknown to men. Two sustained them in their swift and powerful movements, as the ministers of Him whose glory they were ready to set in all the earth.

Now, this vision of the seraphs, as it was seen in the Jewish temple, suggested to the prophet's mind, no doubt, that, notwithstanding the degeneracy of the Jewish priesthood, the true temple of God was filled with heavenly priests, who offered before the throne of Jehovah a pure and acceptable worship, and who would, by their ministry, prepare the way for the fulfilment of divine purposes when Jewish types gave place to eternal realities. Hence, we find that in the vision there was an altar ; that a seraph took a live coal from off it to touch the prophet's lips ; that the ministration of the seraph was the ministration of atonement,—“Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”

Who can doubt that the seraph-priesthood was intended to set forth that pure ministry of Gospel love which superseded the burdensome ritual of the Jewish

temple; which called men to be angels of Grace and witnesses of Divine Glory? How great the contrast—the corrupt and corrupting priests of Judah; the six-winged seraphs, bright in the beauty of the Mercy-seat, going forth to declare sins forgiven in the name of the God of love!

3. Lastly, the service of the Heavenly Temple is briefly indicated. “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.” What was the service? It was the simple, adoring, praise! “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.” “One cried to another.” Doubtless, the musical form of such praise would be antiphonal in the prophet’s ear. The double ranks of seraphs responded as by a double chorus. But much more important than such a formalising of the heavenly music, is the fact of living fellowship in that service of the skies. “One cried to another.” Face to face, voice to voice, they joined in the blessed work of adoration. And are we straining the words, when we see in the thrice-sounded praise, in the threefold adoration, the worship of the triune Jehovah—the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost—out of whose united glory proceeded the salvation of man? “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts!” Is He not holy, separate from

all His creatures, "whom no man can approach or hath approached unto," "dwelling in the high and holy place!" And, yet, hearken unto the voice of the seraphims: "The whole earth is full of His glory!" Holy Father!—who didst "so love the world that Thou didst give Thine only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Holy Son!—who tookest upon Thyself the sins of the whole world, and yet art "crowned with glory and honour." Holy Spirit!—who createst anew them that are fallen, and callest the dead to life! Seraphs wing their way from Thy Divine Person, messengers of mercy to all the millions of mankind; and at last the mighty host of the redeemed on earth shall respond, in the anthem of praise, to the countless multitudes of the unfallen and the glorified in heaven,— "Holy! holy! holy! is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory!"

The pillars or bases of the temple made with hands tottered as if to fall. The cloud gathered around and over all the insignificant, unworthy, offerings and services of sinful men. "The things that are made" must be shaken, "that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." Mysterious, terrible, revolutions attend the seraphic praises. The earth cannot be full of the glory of the Lord, except, first, dark clouds rise up and fill the sphere of human sight. There are signs of the coming glory. The visible temple in which the

prophet saw his vision was shaken to its fall. The whole edifice of Jewish service passed away. Clouds of suffering filled the land. But He who sat on the throne was the same unchangeable Jehovah, the same merciful and righteous King, and His throne was revealed to the whole earth through the dark judgments brought upon His ancient people.

The vision is not imagination ; it is reality. Strike down the wall of sense and sin which hides the glory, and, in an instant, we are standing before "the throne high and lifted up." Can we bear such a revelation ? "Woe is me," cried Isaiah, "for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts !" Who can cry, "Holy," himself unholy ! Who can veil his face before that brightness, when the gaze of Him that sitteth on the throne looks through and through all the secret sins ! How full of encouragement the word which He has sent us everyone,—“Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need !” The High Priest hath entered within the veil. The defiled lips, the defiled life, the sinful heart, can all be touched and made clean by that atoning blood which the messengers of the Gospel bring from the altar of the New Covenant. As Isaiah became an inspired

prophet, so may the humblest and weakest believer in Jesus become an angel of mercy to others. "O come, let us worship and fall down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Lord, fill us with Thy presence, that we may unite with the angels, and say,—“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory!”





THE THRONE OF GOD.

II.

EZEKIEL'S VISION.

“AND ABOVE THE FIRMAMENT THAT WAS OVER THEIR HEADS WAS THE LIKENESS OF A THRONE, AS THE APPEARANCE OF A SAPPHERE STONE: AND UPON THE LIKENESS OF THE THRONE WAS THE LIKENESS AS THE APPEARANCE OF A MAN ABOVE UPON IT. AND I SAW AS THE COLOUR OF AMBER, AS THE APPEARANCE OF FIRE ROUND ABOUT WITHIN IT, FROM THE APPEARANCE OF HIS LOINS EVEN UPWARD, AND FROM THE APPEARANCE OF HIS LOINS EVEN DOWNWARD, I SAW AS IT WERE THE APPEARANCE OF FIRE, AND IT HAD BRIGHTNESS ROUND ABOUT. AS THE APPEARANCE OF THE BOW THAT IS IN THE CLOUD IN THE DAY OF RAIN, SO WAS THE APPEARANCE OF THE BRIGHTNESS ROUND ABOUT. THIS WAS THE APPEARANCE OF THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD. AND WHEN I SAW IT, I FELL UPON MY FACE, AND I HEARD A VOICE OF ONE THAT SPAKE.”—Ezekiel, i., 26-28.

EZEKIEL, the son of a priest, was carried captive, with a large number of his fellow-countrymen,

to the land of Chaldea. A mighty empire had seen to drive its stupendous war-chariot over the prostrate people of Judah, crushing them to ruin. It was righteous judgment of Jehovah upon idolatry, hypocrisy, rebellion. The prophet, full of patriotic feeling, a holy man of God, sat down by the river of Babylon, his "harp hung upon the willows," and wept long and sorely over his stricken country, and for the sins which had thus been visited of God. Divine Inspiration chose him for a better work than lamenting the past. Greater judgments must be sent, except a sinful people put away their sins. Many were hardened, frivolous, perverse, even in captivity. Ezekiel must speak God to his fellow-prisoners. He must preach judgment and mercy. He must proclaim a "just God and a Saviour." A great errand, a burden hard to bear! Who can be sufficient for such things? As it was with Isaiah, the son of Amoz, so it was with Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, the priest—before his heart responded to the Divine call, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" "Here am I; send me!"—"the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God." Thus he was prepared for his work. He carried with him, among dark facts, among dying men, the remembrance of the vision vouchsafed him by the river of Chebar, and it sustained in him heavenly energy, as it had before his eyes heavenly light and glory.

What was the vision? It was the vision of a cele-

chariot, drawn by supernatural beings, containing a glorious throne, and on the throne one in the likeness of man, surrounded by the brightness of God. As this wonderful vision came towards the prophet, there was a "mighty rushing wind," a terrible sound, as though a whirlwind were rolling, with irresistible fury, out of the north, and coming upon him. He waited and watched, with awe and trembling, and the whirlwind seemed to subside, and a "great cloud," dark, dense, came before him. Still he looked and waited for the vision. And in the midst of the thick cloud there was a fire burning. It came forth, and then folded in upon itself, that is, it appeared as though it were bursting forth into great flames, and then it went back into a bright focus. Round about this central fire was a mild glory—rich, transparent amber, going forth "from the midst of the fire" to the edge of the cloud. Still he gazed, more and more intently, and as he gazed the vision became more distinct. He discerned in the glory four living creatures, supernatural beings, "cherubims," (see Chapter x.) as if drawing a sublime chariot, one wheel by the side of each cherub. They had a fourfold countenance, facing every way: the man, the lion, the ox, and the eagle; and their wings were fourfold, two stretching upward and joined one to another, and two stretching downward and covering their bodies; bright, glorious, beings, shining "like burnished brass."

And the chariot itself was like a precious jewel for

beauty. The wheels seemed to rise from earth to heaven "so high that they were dreadful" to look upon; and within wheels, on every side of the chariot, so that it could go in any direction, but still all in close proximity with the living creatures, as though "the spirit of the living creature were in the wheels." And as this wonderful appearance came on swiftly towards him the prophet seemed to hear the rush of myriads of wings, and the rolling of the wheels, like the noise of many waters, "as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the voice of a host." Thus was he prepared for the greatest revelation of all. "Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a map above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake."

This was a vision of the Throne of God. Jelkova

the Lord of hosts, the Ruler, the Redeemer, rides forth in the chariot of His power, "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." All beings, agencies, elements, eventualities, are as the wheels of His triumphal chariot, bearing Him on to the praises of eternity. Looked upon from a distance, the Throne of Righteousness appears as a fierce whirlwind, sweeping all weak creatures to destruction, only terrible; nearer it becomes the dark cloud of mystery, shrouding us in gloom; but, as we look believingly, humbly, with reverent watchfulness awaiting "the heavenly vision," we distinguish that the burning fire of Divine Judgment melts into the perfect glory of Righteous Love! He that sitteth on the throne is surrounded by a host of ministers that do His pleasure. The whole universe, in every direction, is filled with the ministry of heavenly beings, who wait on the word of Jehovah. Whithersoever the Spirit goes, they go. The light of Divine Life is among them always, filling them with celestial energy. Various and manifold their powers, and the characteristics of their activity—the man, the lion, the ox, the eagle: the powers of intellect and reason, the powers of rapacity and violence, the powers of industry and silent toil, the powers of swift, swooping, eagle-like action, "going forth like lightning." All do His bidding. Millions upon millions peopling the worlds, all governed by the same Spirit, all working towards the same end!

Our great poet, Milton, has employed the prophetic vision to add sublimity to his description of heavenly conflict, when the Son of God ascended the chariot of His Father, to drive out the sons of darkness—

“ From all heaven’s bounds into the utter deep.”

“ Forth rush’d with whirlwind sound
 The chariot of Paternal Deity,
 Flashing thick flames, wheel within wheel undrawn,
 Itself instinct with Spirit, but convoy’d
 By four Cherubic shapes : four faces each
 Had wondrous ; as with stars, their bodies all
 And wings were set with eyes ; with eyes the wheels
 Of beryl, and careering fires between ;
 Over their heads a crystal firmament,
 Whereon a sapphire throne, inlaid with pure
 Amber, and colours of the showery arch.
 He, in celestial panoply all arm’d
 Of radiant Urim, work divinely wrought,
 Ascended : at his right hand Victory
 Sat eagle-wing’d ; beside him hung his bow
 And quiver with three-bolted thunder stor’d ;
 And from about him fierce effusion roll’d
 Of smoke, and bickering flame, and sparkles dire.
 Attended with ten thousand thousand Saints,
 He onward came ; far off his coming shone ;
 And twenty thousand (I their number heard)
 Chariots of God, half on each hand, were seen ;
 He on the wings of Cherub rode sublime
 On the crystalline sky ; in sapphire thron’d,
 Illustrious far and wide. * * * *

Into terror chang'd
 His countenance, too severe to be beheld,
 And full of wrath bent on his enemies.
 At once the Four spread out their starry wings
 With dreadful shade contiguous, and the orbs
 Of his fierce chariot roll'd, as with the sound
 Of torrent floods, or of a numerous host.
 He on his impious foes right onward drove,
 Gloomy as night ; under his burning wheels
 The steadfast empyrean shook throughout,
 All but the throne itself of God. * * *

On either side tempestuous fell
 His arrows, from the fourfold-visaged Four
 Distinct with eyes, and from the living wheels
 Distinct alike with multitude of eyes ;
 One Spirit in them ruled ; and every eye
 Glar'd lightning, and shot forth pernicious fire
 Among the accurs'd, that wither'd all their strength,
 And of their wonted vigour left them drain'd,
 Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fallen."

Paradise Lost. Book vi.

Again, as in the vision vouchsafed to the Prophet
 Isaiah, the occupant of the throne is the Son of
 man—God in His revealed character as the Mediator,
 the Angel of the Covenant, the God whose Righteous-
 ness is Love, and whose Love is Righteousness. We
 go further than Ezekiel, and say, not, "the like-
 ness of a man," but, "*the Man, Christ Jesus!*" We are
 led by the prophet's vision to remember the twofold
 character of Him who has come, and is yet to come,

and whom every eye shall see in His glory! He once "consuming fire" and heavenly "light." His terror to His enemies;—glory to His people!

Throughout the Scriptures, the prevailing idea forms a clue running through the successive relations, and connecting them together into one Word of God, is that which is put into figurative in the vision of Ezekiel. The Throne of God, through all time and all things; a throne of In Power, but a throne of Redeeming Grace! Can we understand God a Saviour, except we see God Ruler? Can we separate the whole history of Divine Providence from the history of Salvation? Surely not! Ezekiel dwelt, a captive, among an idolatrous people. He would find it impossible to speak to fellow-captives about deliverance and forgiveness; the name of God, except he could fill them with thought of God's righteousness, as they could see their own sufferings; except he could show them that their heathen conquerors were just as truly under the eye of that righteous God as themselves. And every believer in Jesus must feel, as he dwells on the gracious revelations of the Gospel, that they grow of the more terrible communications of the law; the historians, and the prophets of the elder Testament. The whirlwind becomes the cloud; the cloud with fiery splendour, and in the midst of the splendour we discern, at last, one "like unto the Son of Man."

the Elder Brother, beloved of the Father, "whose name is called Jesus; for he saves His people from their sins."

The brightness round about the head of Immanuel is "as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain." Noah, the patriarch, just escaped from the destruction which declared the righteousness of an unchangeable God, just come forth out of the Ark of Love, that had been his refuge amid the flood of vengeance, stepping on the new earth, which had been swept of its corruption by a divine hand, looked into the heavens and beheld the "bow in the cloud." "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations." Out of the cloud had come forth the instrument of death; in the cloud is set the seal of the Covenant of Love. "Behold," in the Cross of Jesus, "the goodness and severity of God!" On the darkness of that Mount of Expiation, where the guilt of a rebellious world crucifies the Lamb of God taking away its sins, Infinite Love sets the bow of promise! It is the covenant between Him that sits upon the throne and His believing people. "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

And, now, let us draw from this vision some truth of practical bearing, by which we may connect it with our own spiritual interests.

1. The vision reveals to us the unity of God's purposes. Amidst innumerable beings, inexhaustible fulness of life and action, swiftly moving wheels, and wheels within wheels, ever moving onward, and full of eyes that looked in every direction, one Throne in the centre, one living, personal, Ruler holds all in His hand! Is not this what all need to see? We hide much of the "glory of the Lord" which Ezekiel saw, if we fail to apply this great truth—the unity of the Divine Purpose—to the doctrine of our salvation. It seems a common failing with many, who understand something of the Gospel, that they see it only in its bearings upon their individual state, as sinners calling for a Saviour. Gratitude for pardoned sins, and for the prospect of heaven, will sometimes stir them to efforts for a perishing world; but they seldom rise above the thoughts of their own relation to the Son of God as a Deliverer. Such a vision as the prophet's must, to such minds, appear remote and irrelevant. They see it to be very wonderful and sublime, but it holds no practical relation to their own experience. Hence, a great deal of the religious character and activity of our own times wears an aspect of narrowness. How difficult it is to vindicate the necessity of

maintaining Christian principle, among the claims, and in the face of the excitements, of common life, without appearing to do some dishonour to the spirituality of religion ! And, yet, if Ezekiel saw things clearly, the glory of the Lord is plainly to be looked for in connection with political changes. The throne of the God-man is borne on the wheels of Providential government ; the Saviour's countenance comes forth out of the whirlwind and the cloud. We must never, as Christians, hide from ourselves the fact, that the Lord Jesus Christ is "subduing all things unto Himself." The whole history of this world is an enigmatical confusion, except we read it with this key in our hands, the one sovereign purpose of Jehovah,— "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth ; even in Him." Our own individual history, regarded as a succession of isolated facts, is full of dark and oppressive mysteries ; but in the light of one divine purpose, weaving the whole world into a perfect government, much that was dark disappears. We are created to be His ministers, as truly as the highest angels. We have our place beside the great chariot wheels of His rule. Those things which, to us, seem irreconcilable with goodness, will, one day, shine forth as stars in the firmament of His perfect righteousness. Those commandments which we found it difficult to blend with

inclination, which seemed to call up the world against us as we sought to fulfil them, will, one day, be identified with the very marks of the chariot wheels. He bids us simply take our place, and go on with the course of His all-wise working. And, wherever we are appointed to be, and to labour, there is the same Divine Spirit ready to fill us with energy, and guide our life, as "the flames of fire went up and down among the living creatures," in Ezekiel's vision. He has prepared for us, at last, a place before the throne. We shall see "the glory of the Lord!" We shall "reign with Him for ever and ever in His kingdom!"

2. The prophet's vision, being connected immediately with his mission and message by which he pleaded for the salvation of rebellious Israel, reveals the essential truth of the Gospel, that "*God is love.*" True, there was much that was terrible in the vision Ezekiel, when he looked upon so great a sight, fell upon his face, unable to endure it, for he felt just as Simon Peter felt, when he saw the innumerable draught of fishes, and the glory of God which it revealed, that he was a sinful man. But the vision as a whole means Love. The Man was on the throne. The fire melted into amber. The throne itself was "as the appearance of a sapphire stone," that is, "as the body of heaven in its clearness," the mild blue of the great expanse—fi

emblem of Divine purity and love! All that Divine power performs is the fulfilment of Infinite love. The heavens have been opened to us in brighter visions than the prophets were permitted to see. It was said of John the Baptist, that, of those born of women, a greater prophet had not arisen, "notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Greater he is, because of the greater message; because he has seen a greater opening of heaven. We stand on higher ground than Isaiah and Ezekiel, or even John the Baptist. We are commissioned to declare a greater message. Dimly, for ages, was it spoken; but, now, we have "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We go forth from the opened heaven of the Gospel history, to plead with a rebellious world, over which the judgments of God are hanging, through which the mighty wheels are carrying the glorious Throne! Oh, let nothing ever cloud the amber brightness of Redeeming Love! Let us look till our own faces have caught the glory, that we may be able to speak in His name. Let us carry the beams of His mercy into the dark desolations of this fallen world; let us reflect them into the depths of poverty and sin; let us break down every shadowing wall, and open the way for the revealed heaven to glorify all human homes and lives, for He that sitteth on the throne is Love!

3. A prophet's office and inspiration need not be waited for, to "see visions of God." In that lowly chamber where we bow the knee in secret, where we lift up the hands before an invisible Mercy-seat, Faith will reveal to us the Throne of Grace, and round about it we shall see the bow of Promise! Like Ezekiel of old, we may first see only the whirlwind and the dark cloud—our sins threatening destruction, hiding the countenance of God with the darkness of our own fears; but have we faith to wait and look? Look at the wonderful workings of His love who "hath shown the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." "Behold the Lamb of God!" See the Victim on the altar; the "precious blood" flowing down from His wounds, streams of mercy, "cleansing from all unrighteousness!" Is not the dark cloud already being gilded with hope, brighter, brighter, as we look and believe? The sins are gone; only the Saviour is left. He is highly exalted, "he is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." Day by day, the Throne is accessible. The Saviour stands there! "The glory of the Lord" is still visible. The rainbow of promise never fades! We tell Him all our wants; we confess before Him all our weaknesses and faults; we ask of Him power and light, joy and salvation. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Above the firmament, over the heads of all principalities and

powers, in the centre of all things that work together in the universe, Jesus is seated, and we who approach and bow down before Him, are able to say, by faith,—
“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!”





THE THRONE OF GOD.

III.

DANIEL'S VISION.

"I BEHELD TILL THE THRONES WERE CAST DOWN, AND THE ANCIENT OF DAYS DID SIT, WHOSE GARMENT WAS WHITE AS SNOW, AND THE HAIR OF HIS HEAD LIKE THE PURE WOOL: HIS THRONE WAS LIKE THE FIERY FLAME, AND HIS WHEELS AS BURNING FIRE. A FIERY STREAM ISSUED AND CAME FORTH FROM BEFORE HIM: THOUSAND THOUSANDS MINISTERED UNTO HIM, AND TEN THOUSAND TIMES TEN THOUSAND STOOD BEFORE HIM: THE JUDGMENT WAS SET, AND THE BOOKS WERE OPENED."—Daniel, vii., 9-10.

DANIEL'S mission, as a prophet, was somewhat different from that of his predecessors in the prophetic office. His visions are apocalyptic. They have a wider scope and a more distinct historical character than those which were sent as direct messages to the people of Israel. He was appointed to teach the true church of God, both of that time and of all succeeding

times, that "the kingdoms of this world" must, at last, "become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ," and that all human history is subordinate to the method and purpose of the Divine counsels. It is this definite, historical, character of Daniel's visions which has excited against his prophecy more antagonistic criticism, in modern times, than has attacked any other book of Scripture. The enemies of revealed truth have recognised that, if Daniel's predictions were genuine announcements of events, before their occurrence, then it is vain to doubt the inspiration of prophecy. Much, indeed, remains still open to controversy, both in respect to the authority of portions of the Book of Daniel, and in respect to the interpretations of his visions; but it may be affirmed, that the strongest evidence supports the scriptural canonicity of the whole. We may doubt whether all was written at the same time, or even by the same hand, but we cannot fairly doubt that the visions were seen by Daniel himself, and, therefore, that the predictions were genuinely inspired of God.

You will often have noticed that the visions of the Book of Daniel chiefly concern kings and kingdoms; their order of appearance; their comparative strength and glory; their final destiny and doom. In the second chapter, Nebuchadnezzar's dream is related with Daniel's divinely-prompted "interpretation thereof." This may be regarded as a kind of key to all the

subsequent visions. The gigantic colossus which the Babylonian monarch saw in his dream, with head of gold, body of silver, legs of brass, and feet of mixed iron and clay, afterwards broken in pieces by the stone "cut out of the mountains without hands," which filled the whole earth, represented the course of Divine Providence, in the history of mankind, whereby "all things are subdued" to Him who is "the King of kings and Lord of lords." In the seventh chapter we read that the prophet himself "had a dream and visions of his head, upon his bed." Four different kinds of beasts appear, the result of the "four winds of the heaven striving upon the great sea," that is, each one made an instrument of God's universal government among mankind; a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fierce, powerful, beast, "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly, with iron teeth." As the image was destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, so are the beasts in Daniel's. "Their dominion is taken away. The Son of Man, who cometh with the clouds of heaven, has dominion given unto Him, "an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, a kingdom which shall not be destroyed."

Now, whether these two parallel dreams represent the history of mankind previous to the Incarnation, or look on to the end of the world; whether they referred to four empires which the world has already seen arise and fall; or described four *kinds* of dominion which

should follow in the same order through the history of man, of which the four empires previous to the Christian Church were examples, we must not now attempt to decide. One class of interpreters see in them the Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Alexandrian kingdoms; another class carry the prophecy further, and find the four empires in the Chaldean, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman. But without entering upon this vexed question, we can draw from the prophet's vision this general conclusion,—the tyrannies founded by men, and preying like savage beasts upon human happiness, must be swept away; through all the convulsions and vicissitudes of kingdoms and nations, a Power is being revealed which is subject to no such instability, which is the source of no such evils—a kingdom which is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;” a King whom “all nations shall call blessed,” whose “name shall endure for ever,” and with whose glory “the whole earth shall be filled.” There is one great reality which, if we have faith to see it, becomes a guiding light through all human affairs; an omnipotent support to all that is just and true and good; a glory shining through every cloud, waiting at the end of every conflict! Whether we look at bad men and bad things in high places, or at good men and good things brought low; whether we are perplexed with doubts, or weary with long waiting; whether we sigh for lost

peace, or mourn in present desolation,—one vision there is, which, if we can only see it as we ought, will supply us with abundant comfort, which reveals to us our true position, teaches us how to try the worth of all earthly things, points us onward to the destination of our course, prepares us to wait calmly and cheerfully the unfolding secrets of eternity,—it is the vision of a Throne, a Monarch, a trial, with gathered myriads, with thousands upon thousands of divine ministers of justice; a judgment, a sentence, and a final consummation! This was the vision which Daniel, the exile, saw, and which was placed in the midst of his prophecies as the key to all the mysteries of this world's events.

A trifling correction of the English version, in the ninth verse, removes all difficulty in understanding the scene which was presented to the prophet's eye. The word rendered "cast down," should be rather, "*set down*." "I beheld till the thrones were set down," that is, I watched the preparations made in a sublime heavenly court, and, at last, thrones were placed round about one central Throne (as in the Apocalypse we read, that "round about the throne were four and twenty seats.") The word employed may be taken either in the sense of "erection" or of "overthrowing." Calvin, whose interpretations of Scripture are generally characterised by fairness and strict adherence to the original, remarks on this word: "I think the thrones of

seats are here placed to exhibit the Divine judgment, because the prophet will immediately represent myriads of angels standing before God. We know how often angels are adorned with this title, as if they were assessors of Deity; and the form of speech which Daniel uses, when he says, 'the judgment was set,' will also agree with this. He spake here of assessors with the judge, as if God did not sit alone, but had councillors joined with Him. In my opinion, the most suitable explanation is,—thrones were created for the Almighty to sit on with His councillors; not implying His need of any council, but that of His own goodwill and mere favour He dignifies angels with this honour. Daniel, therefore, describes after our human fashion, the preparations for judgment; just as if any king should go publicly forth for the purpose of transacting any business of moment, and should ascend his tribunal. Councillors and nobles would sit around him on both sides, not partaking of his power, but rather increasing the splendour of his appearance. For if the king alone should occupy the whole place, the dignity would not be so magnificent as when his nobles, who depend upon him, are present on all sides, because they far surpass the ordinary multitude."

The heavens became one vast royal council chamber. Shining thrones rose in order higher and higher in a circle of glory, each occupied by an angelic being, pure and majestic in appearance, wearing a coronet of

splendour; and in the midst, highest of all, was one supreme and most magnificent throne, the brightness of which the eye could not bear to look upon. On that central throne was seated One whose aspect was at once infinitely beautiful and sublimely terrible. Pure white, dazzling as the driven snow of the mountain, when the midday sun is reflected from it, were the flowing robes of His garment and the hair of His head. He seemed to be seated upon blazing light. The throne itself was fire. The wheels looked like vast flames rolling round, and ready to devour. A stream of fire came out from under the throne, like a flood, surging and boiling furiously, with waves of flame, rushing onward, threatening irresistible destruction to all in its way. To and fro myriads of glorious beings moved swiftly, ascending to the throne, and then, as if bearing a commission from their Lord, winging their way downwards. A countless multitude of beings—human beings—kings, princes, nobles, priests of all nations, all kinds of men, stood assembled, silent and awed, trembling, before that Divine presence! “And the judgment was set, and the books were opened.” And Daniel heard the name of Him that sat upon the throne,—“the Ancient of days.”

Comparing this vision with those of preceding prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel, it must immediately strike us that, whereas in the former visions, the two ideas of government and judgment were blended, in

Daniel's vision judgment is pre-eminent. Every detail of the vision is connected with the idea of judgment. The title given to Him that occupies the central throne is suggestive of His character, as Judge. "*Ancient of days*," is a description of God as watching and judging from day to day; from the beginning all through the course of human affairs; infinitely venerable, because infinitely wise; omniscient, unerring, the just and holy Judge upon the seat of righteousness! The spotlessly white garment, and "the hairs of His head like the pure wool," betoken the perfection of His nature and of His laws by which all must be tried. The surrounding thrones occupied by angelic beings, or by glorified saints, represents the Divine administration of justice; all that stand in the presence of God being His willing servants, to execute His laws and to declare His righteousness. The throne, fiery flame, and the wheels, burning fire, and the fiery stream issuing immediately from the seat of justice, denote the irresistibility of God's will in punishing the guilty, in consuming His enemies, in preparing the way for the fulfilment of His purposes. The opened books are the perfect knowledge of God revealing all secret things, and setting all actions and all thoughts in the light of His countenance. The ministering thousands and the assembled myriads, are the representatives of the whole universe of responsible creatures; some, unfallen attendants upon Deity; others, standing to be judged

before Him, according to their works recorded in the book, and by the standard of the everlasting righteousness.

Daniel was looking on visions of destroying beasts and oppressive tyrannies, when he saw this vision of judgment. "I beheld till the thrones were set down. He gazed, with astonishment that such evil power should be permitted to work their will amongst men but, at last, he saw them brought to judgment. "The beast slain and his body destroyed and given to the burning flame," the rest of the beasts deprived of the dominion, "the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven," and receiving from the Judge "dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Divine judgment is viewed, then, in this vision, as preparing the way for the kingdom of Christ. The judgment is executed upon kings and nations—upon the powers of this world. More than two thousand years have passed away since the vision was seen; how many instances has the truth of it been confirmed? Individuals, indeed, are not in every case brought to judgment on this side of eternity, even though the deeds have been of the blackest guilt; they are reserved, though not without some signal exception to the more perfect retribution of another world. But

nations, kingdoms, thrones, powers of the world,—they are judged, and their sentence executed, before the end of time, because they are not capable of any other judgment than that which is worked out in human history. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Macedonia, Rome—have they not all been tried with the fire which issued and came forth from the throne of God? Where are now their wealth, their pomp, their pride, their boasted prowess and subduing force? All that was good in them, all that contributed to the advancement of humanity, and which was not consumed by the fire of Righteousness, still remains, now mingled indistinguishably with the better materials derived from a higher source; but the empires of antiquity have been judged and punished. “They had their dominion taken away.” Is not the same fire of Righteousness consuming still? Who brake in pieces the sceptre of the Imperial tyrant, “casting forth” His cold upon the mighty hosts; “breaking the bow and cutting the spear in sunder, burning the chariot in the fire?” Who has been passing from nation to nation, during our own days, judging and punishing—to Naples, to Austria, to America, to Spain? All that is false, all that is cruel and unjust, all that is ungodly and unchristian, whether it be in thrones or in institutions, whether it stand out in the strong outlines of youthful vigour, bold and rugged, or be covered over, and to many eyes glorified, with the hoary disguise of antiquity,—all must be

tried "of what sort it is," by the consuming fire of unchangeable Righteousness, "issuing and coming forth from the throne of God."

But this vision of judgment was not a vision of men destruction. The throne of the Judge was a chariot of progress. Fiery wheels carry it swiftly forward in the path which the stream of judgment clears of its opponents. The end is the kingdom of Messiah established for ever!

The Christian, my brethren, needs this vision as truly as the Israelite. Through all the Divine dealings one glorious end is being wrought out. We must never separate our present life from that gracious purpose. And as Daniel, the prophet, beheld the kingdoms of this world in the shape of destroying beasts, themselves destroyed in the judgments of God that One like unto the Son of Man might reign in their stead, so let us believe that no merely worldly principles will be able to stand against the consuming fire of the Righteous Throne. What a rebuke we find in the teaching of the prophet, of all attempts to hasten the triumph of Christianity, by borrowing, on its behalf, the impure help of mere secular authority. True, the power of this world's kingdoms must be brought into the kingdom of Christ. But there never yet has been devised any method of alliance between an earthly throne and the Christian Church, in which the true spiritual power of Christianity was not, in

some way, compromised. The State is not itself an offspring of the Church. If it were purely so ; if its foundations were simply and solely Christian ; if its methods of rule were reconcileable with the government of Christ ; then, indeed, an alliance between the state and the church would be natural, for the advancement of each, for the blessing of mankind. But it is not so. The state, in every instance, had its first roots in heathenism. It has grown out of the darkness of a pre-Christian society. Many of its leading characteristics are directly opposed to the spirit and practice of the Gospel. The attempt to connect together, in one institution, the principles of the world and the principles of Christ, has led to innumerable instances of dishonour to the throne of God and fiery sufferings desolating humanity. One of the strangest phenomena, among the many inexplicable mysteries of human character, is, that many spiritually-minded men should see no inconsistency in upholding an alliance between church and state, while, at the same time, they profess to be watching and praying for the time when the Son of Man shall receive the kingdom, and all other kingdoms shall be absorbed in His everlasting dominion. They seem to deceive themselves with a hollow name. They call the nation "Christian," and they would fain believe that Acts of Parliament creating what is termed a "State Church," that is, giving to the State certain ecclesiastical powers and

functions, have been able to make the nation itself Christian, and incorporate it with the kingdom of Christ. Surely, that is altogether a different representation from the Scriptural one. The State cannot make itself Christian in anything but the name. The kingdom of Christ must come forth from the King Himself. He who by His Grace creates the spiritual life, and, therefore, who alone creates the Christian man, must also, by that Grace working in harmony with His universal providence, give to a nation a place in His everlasting dominion.

In these days, we plainly see the fire which comes forth to consume all unrighteousness trying men's ecclesiastical arrangements. The words of the Apostle Paul suggest themselves, as finding their fulfilment in the history of our own time,—“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Cor. iii., 11, 12, 13, 16, 17.)

But the vision is one of universal judgment. Before

the Ancient of days all must be gathered, whether they be partakers of His kingdom or enemies to be tried by His holy law. The books shall be opened. He who sits upon the throne can turn to the page which records each individual life, and its true character. Sealed, as they often are, to human eyes, unreadable sometimes even to the sinner himself, because of their perplexity, to His searching gaze they are pages clearly writ. The book of facts and the book of laws, both shall be opened. The judgment is set. It must be carried through to the end. The sentence must be passed. The execution must be accomplished. Shall He whose fiery anger has consumed so many evil things since the world began, whose judgments are still in the earth, conspicuous and terrible, not be heeded by us when He speaks from His throne, and warns us to repent of our wickedness and live? A book is opened now; a book, not of remembered sins and just judgments, but of mingled grace and truth. It tells of sins whose guilt has been already borne; of a Sacrifice whose merit can never be exhausted; of a Love which has promised to go with every sinner who shall hide in it, even to the seat of God. Have we opened that book ourselves? Have we looked into that perfect law of liberty, and are we continuing therein? Is the blood of Atónement secured for us as the plea in that great day of His appearing?

The prophet's vision is reality. The throne is set. The Ancient of days keeps the book of remembrance ready for the solemn hour of revelation. Let the mist of sense clear away, and the great assembly is before us! Among the ten thousand times ten thousand, every soul shall stand out, shall know itself recognised, as though it stood alone with God. Are we watching the days of our present life, as days that are hurrying on to that day of days?

In the last chapter of the New Testament Apocalypse, we read that a "river of water of life, clear as crystal," was seen by the apostle, "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." Daniel saw a fiery stream issuing and coming forth out of the throne of judgment. Both are real; both have their divine mission; both flow into the sphere of human existence. We invite you, my friends, to fly from the stream of wrath, and to rejoice in the fountain of mercy! Follow the Lamb whithersoever He leads you. He will take you into the Paradise of God. He will give you "right to the tree of life," which grows by the crystal river. You shall be among "the saints of the Most High who shall take the kingdom and possess it for ever, even for ever and ever!"





THE THRONE OF GOD.

IV.

THE APOSTLE JOHN'S VISION.

"AND, BEHOLD, A THRONE WAS SET IN HEAVEN, AND ONE SAT ON THE THRONE. AND HE THAT SAT WAS TO LOOK UPON LIKE A JASPER AND A SARDINE STONE : AND THERE WAS A RAINBOW ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE, IN SIGHT LIKE UNTO AN EMERALD."

Rev., iv., 2-3.

JOH N, a "brother, a companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." A Christian exile sees visions of God. The Spirit of the risen Jesus calls the lonely and now aged Apostle to "come up" to an "open door" in heaven, and look through upon the glorious things behind the veil, and see "things which must be hereafter." We should naturally expect that a vision vouchsafed to an apostle of Christ, at the end of the first century of the Christian era, would be larger in scope, brighter in glory, less

enigmatical in structure and significance, than those which were attached to the ministrations of Old Testament prophets. This expectation is not disappointed. We find the visions of the throne of God which prophets saw, revived and incorporated in the apostle's vision, and we find the Christian seer enlightened with a more distinct understanding of the heavenly symbols.

Isaiah saw the throne of God in the temple, surrounded by seraphims "crying one to another, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." *Ezekiel*, sitting by the river of Chebar, saw the throne of God as a chariot of war coming out of a whirlwind and going forth over the earth, attended by mighty ministers of judgment, carrying the Son of Man to victory. *Daniel* beheld the great session of justice; the gathered myriads before the awful purity of the Divine Judge; the consuming laws executed by the faithful servants. But the Christian *Apostle*, looking through the door of heaven, beheld all these ancient visions, which had come down through eight centuries of time, blended into one. He saw *Isaiah's* seraphims, but they had the appearance of *Ezekiel's* living creatures, with fourfold countenance; their wings were still visible, and their voices still responded, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" He saw the thrones round about the Throne, as *Daniel* saw them, but he was able to count them; they were four and twenty; and upon

the seats he "saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold." The stream of fire which the prophet saw proceeding from under the throne, was now "a sea of glass like unto crystal." He that sat on the throne, who appeared to Ezekiel as though He were clothed with fiery amber, was, "to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone;" and the rainbow was still there, "round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." "Lightnings, thunderings, and voices," proceeded out of the throne, as before fire flowed out and devoured. The "seven Spirits of God," like "burning lamps of fire," stand in the presence of the Holy One. And the apostle witnessed the sublime service of heaven, the living creatures "giving glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne," and, in response to their worship, "the four and twenty elders falling down before Him, and casting their crowns before Him and worshipping Him," and singing their united praises,—“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created!”

Now, in characterising this apostolic vision of the Throne of God, regarded as a whole, we must bear in mind that it forms the introduction to a series of visions in which there is a rapid transition from scene to scene, many agents, and many great events

witnessed. Daniel describes, in a few general words, how he saw One like the Son of Man come with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days, and "there was given Him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him." The Apostle John sees, in the visions of the Apocalypse, this general prediction of universal dominion enlarged into minute detail. "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David," the "Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth," takes from the Divine Judge and Ruler the "book with seven seals," and opens the seals. We must, therefore, seek for a meaning to the vision of the fourth chapter which shall correspond, in extent and comprehensiveness, with the fulness and elaborateness of the subsequent predictions, in which we cannot doubt are set forth the leading facts of Christian history, from the beginning of Messiah's rule to the final consummation in the manifestation of the New Jerusalem.

While there are difficulties almost insurmountable in respect to some points of minor importance, the broad features of the apostolic vision are simple and distinct.

First, we may note the representation of Him that sat on the throne. His appearance was like a jasper and a sardine stone, that is, there was a blending

together, in His look, of the mild and of the fiery, (or, as some would interpret, of the pure white and of the burning red.) The title which was heard by the apostle is somewhat different from that heard by the prophets,—“Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!” And, again, the song of heaven takes up the theme of creation for the pleasure of God,—“Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.” The rainbow, too, round about the throne like an emerald, is very prominently brought forward by the apostle at the commencement of the description. Putting these points together, and regarding the whole spirit of the vision, we conclude that the glorious Person seen by St. John was the God of the New Testament, “reconciling the world unto Himself,” “gathering together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.” We are reminded, still, of the solemn judgment and of the fiery wrath; but we are reminded, yet more, of the perfect Will, which gathers all beings and all powers round the one centre, and receives “glory, honour, and power,” from all. This more prominent Christian element in the vision is seen in the introduction of the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, “which are the seven Spirits of God.” For when we connect this language with that employed in the previous chapter, the seven churches having seven stars, identified with them; and the seven

golden candlesticks giving "light, as the Son of Man walketh in the midst of them," with "the seven stars in His right hand;" and the Spirit of God sending messages to the seven churches;—we feel that we have passed from the region of the Old Testament to that of the New, and that we are concerned with Christians, and the establishment of Christianity in the world. It is exceedingly important to bear this in mind, in giving an interpretation to the vision as a whole.

Then, once more, "the sea of glass like unto crystal," before the throne, is more in harmony with evangelical facts, than the stream of fire issuing forth for, while the shining, transparent glass, *reflecting* the fiery splendour of Divine glory, would itself *look fiery*, still, that the apostle could so describe it as "*like unto crystal*," is certainly meant to bring out prominently the transparent simplicity of the Divine government manifested especially in the development of Christianity. Thus, we are invited by the Christian seer to think of the "Lord God Almighty, the Creator of all things" as anew seated in judgment, after the fulness of time has come and Christianity has gone forth into the world; to see Him surrounded by those who shall apply the standard of Christ to the actions of men while all the ministering agencies of creation are made to proclaim, ceaselessly, the holiness of Him whose highest glory has been manifested in Redemption.

whose unchangeable character is the uniting truth of all the dispensations, "who was, and is, and is to come."

Secondly. We cannot but observe the distinction which is made in this apostolic vision between the two orders of heavenly beings about the throne, and their employments. There are *four living creatures* in the midst of the throne and round about the throne,—the lion-like, the calf-like, the human, the flying eagle ; all winged and full of eyes ; and "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy !" There are *four and twenty elders*, on thrones, with crowns on their heads, and they fall down and worship, casting their crowns before the throne. The one order of beings is simply *administrative*, and glorify God by their various unresting natures and activities. The other order is *judicial and governmental*, being representatives and vicegerents of God, to declare His counsels, to make known His judgments, to reign in His name, and at last to "*cast their crowns*" before Him. We can easily see that distinction, now that Christianity has become a living power and distinct organisation amongst men. Allusion, it is generally thought, is made, in the number twenty-four, to the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles, and the name "*elders*" would be quite familiar to all Jewish readers, in connection with the synagogue, and would also recall the governing elders of Israel. So that we can be at no loss to interpret the vision, in its broad meanings, as setting forth the

co-operation, in the government of God, of the directly Christian powers with those of nature and of creation generally. Christ is "head over all to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

And, then, *lastly*, the vision is introduced less as a means of preparing the apostle's own mind for personal trials, than as a part of one great whole, and we are led to connect the opened heaven with the opened book of prophecy, and so to hear as if an echo, from the heights of God's own immediate presence, of the solemn benediction,—“Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep these things which are written therein : for the time is at hand.” Surely, with such a beginning to the visions of the Apocalypse, we cannot but believe that, if they be reverently studied, and looked at with the eye of a simple Christian faith, they will help us to “give glory to Him that sitteth on the throne.” We shall see more clearly, by their light, that all things visible and invisible are working together to accomplish the pleasure of Him who created them, and that His pleasure is that “the kingdoms of this world should become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.” We should hear the book itself saying to us, as the trumpet voice to the apostle,—“Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter!”

These three main teachings of the apostolic vision, we will now briefly set forth in their order.

1. The Throne "set in heaven" is the throne of Redeeming Love. Until the Christian revelation cast out, with its heavenly light, the darkness of man's sinful thoughts of God, the two ideas of a Throne and of Love were widely separated from one another. The highest conception of a king among the wisest heathen of ancient times, was that of impersonated Justice; and the highest conception of justice was that of equal distribution to all, according to merits or rights. It would not have been possible for a heathen seer to have made such a vision as the apostle's intelligible to his heathen contemporaries. The sight of a throne would, at once, have excluded, in their minds, the thought of love. They would have seen only Power, subduing all things by its inherent superiority; and their feeling would have been only that of submissive awe. Now, as we read the apostle's vision of the heavenly throne, surrounded by the heavenly beings, in the midst of the heavenly glory, connecting every element in the vision with the revelations of Christianity, we are able, at a glance, to recognise the immeasurable interval there is between the thoughts of a Christian and those of the heathen world. "God is love,"—God is "He that sitteth on the throne," who has "created all things, and for whose pleasure they are and were

created." Love, then, is the essential power of the universe. Christianity knows no distinction between Justice and Love. They are one, in God. He is "a just God and a Saviour," He is the same Love when He judges as when He saves. His love is His perfection, it is His holiness ; in which He is infinitely exalted above all His creatures. For Divine love is not as human love—a feeling drawn out by an object, and in proportion to the object. It is the Infinite Being finding His glory in the pure, perfect, happiness of all other beings. Justice is a form of that Divine love, for it is the perfect law of God's being applied to all other beings. Redemption is Infinite love bringing back a lost world into harmony with itself. The throne "set in heaven," is the throne from which issue forth the powers of the new creation—the Almighty love, which is "glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men." Is it derogatory to Infinite love to be represented as enthroned, as surrounded by reigning and judging "elders," as sending forth from the throne "lightnings and thunderings and voices?" Must not Love be itself Law? Every being has its own law, which means the condition of its perfect happiness and continued existence. The Love which finds its own glory in universal perfection of being, must be "consuming fire" to all that opposes its own law. Sin is perversion of God's creation ; violation of the law of happiness ; the anarchy of selfishness.

introduced into the kingdom of love. Christianity is the proclamation of a throne set in heaven, and of the name of Him that sits upon it. Behold! the King to whose sceptre all must bow, who alone is "worthy to receive glory and honour and power." Not an Omnipotent Will without Personal Character; not a mere personification of abstract qualities in their infinite perfection;—a Being, the law of whose omnipotence is love, whose pleasure is in creation, whose glory is in the reflection of His own existence in the pure and happy existence of His creatures. From such a throne the message of the Gospel is sent forth—at the same time Justice and Mercy; for this is the one only condemnation, which flashes forth lightning from God's presence, which rolls thunder in God's voice,—that the light of Divine Love has come into the world, and men have loved the darkness of their own selfishness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Love redeemed the world by the Cross; love rules the world from the Throne! "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love."

2. Another main feature in the apostolic vision is the co-ordination and co-operation of two different kinds of attendants on the throne of God,—“the four living creatures in the midst of the throne and round about the throne,” and “the four and twenty elders,” crowned and enthroned, sitting in council round about. Thus


is set forth the intimate relation of the natural and the providential with the distinctly Christian and spiritual, in the whole sphere of Divine government. This is a truth which is often obscured to our sight. The apostle's vision is a great help, if it clears away such obscurity; for a truth so vital has manifold application in the practical life of believers. The living creatures were "full of eyes before and behind," and "full of eyes within;" each of them had "six wings;" and "they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!" This unresting activity of universal being is in the midst of the throne and round about the throne. God is the life of it. God is the glory of it. Day and night there is no pause in the hallelujahs of creation. "He inhabiteth eternity, and the praises thereof." And the lion, the calf, the man, and the flying eagle, while they present their several and diverse features to view, do yet blend their voices into one ceaseless song. How the great intellects of our race have delighted to contemplate that unity and sublime order of the natural world! In our own day, when science is pushing its researches into every province of creation, with an eagerness, yea, an avidity of results, never before known, how wonderfully all the various voices of nature are heard to harmonise! We simplify our conclusions more and more as we advance in knowledge. We hope that we shall resolve many

things which are now complicated, into still more fundamental elements. And the attitude of the scientific mind seems to be that of intent listening to catch, if possible, the monotone of the universe. Need we, then, for a moment, encourage the thought that the attitude of the student of nature, and of physical and moral laws, is one irreconcilable with reverence for Christianity; or that the Christian must disparage the inquiries of science, and speak of the Church as though it were too sacred a place for any language to be heard in it but that which is an echo of Scripture? Surely, in the apostle's vision there is reproof of such a thought. "And when those living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne."

If the general signification attached to these two orders of beings by most who have studied the apostle's vision be correct, without venturing to interpret the exact meaning of the vision, we may yet conclude that it points to a perfect correspondence and union between the two spheres of Divine government—that of natural and moral law, and that of the Christian economy. The ultimate issue of things must be, that the Christian life is the most natural and the most happy life. Christianity is, in a sense, a sword

in the world ; not because its nature is sword-like but because a disordered world makes it so. The Cross is the symbol of Redemption ; but when a redeemed world has been filled with that Love which can never rest until all is one with itself, the Cross will be seen no more, the elders and the living creature will unite in one blissful service of praise !

And, while still there is conflict, darkness, suffering and the Church and the world seem as two antagonistic powers pitted against one another, let us hold fast to the truth which is taught us by this vision,—that in God there is no contradiction, for “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” The same Divine love which speaks in Revelation speaks in Nature and in Providence. There are no discrepancies, except to our poor eyes, between the ways and works of God in the universe around us, and the ways and works of God as the Holy Spirit has described them by the pen of Scripture. The true faith is that which follows the leading of Divine love, whether in the facts of the outward and visible world, or in the declarations of the only begotten Son. And, just as he is no true “believer” who, while he cries “Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,” amidst the glories of a material creation, bows not before the Word made flesh, adores not the Love which expresses its “*very image*” in Jesus ; so he is no acceptable worshipper of the Father who, while he acknowledges the glory of Redemption



has no ear for the Love which speaks in every living thing, and has made the universe its own reflection ! A Christian should guard against that unchristian narrowness which takes religion to mean a certain limited doctrine about God, and a certain prescribed course of life in the world. We must lift up our Bibles into the light of God, that we may find ourselves in the region of that pure and holy Love which will teach us how to find—

“ Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

3. Regarding this vision of the Throne of God as an introduction to the apocalyptic revelations of the whole book, we are led to rest in the thought that all the workings of the Divine government proceed in the order of an allwise development, the general characteristics of which are unfolded to us in the roll of prophecy. The more closely man studies the work of God in creation, the more clearly he discerns the law of development and progressive advancement. It was the function of the Apostle John to teach us to apply the same principle, in its most comprehensive form, to the universal government of God. However little we can draw up, from this book of Revelation, a scheme of the world's history, and characterise events by its language, we can, at least, learn from it that there is no retrogression in the affairs of men, as there

is no retrogression in the course of nature. The whole world is moving on, this book says, in the hands of Him whose throne is set in heaven, and whose ministers are ever about Him. Age after age, the prophecy still holds its blessing for them that keep it, and read it. The John-like soul will hear a voice, saying,—“Come up hither,” away from the distractions and confusions of fellow-creatures, into the serene atmosphere of the opened heaven. “Come and see” the Lamb, who is able “to take the book and to open the seals thereof.” Come and learn the new song of His praise. And “the bright and morning Star” will ever appear to thee, thy leading light, thy beaming hope ; at last, thy full noon of glory !

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly ; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus !”





CHRIST AND NICODEMUS.

A SCRIPTURE STUDY.

THERE is special value, as well as special interest, in those portions of the evangelical records in which are preserved the conversations held between our Lord Jesus Christ and particular individuals. It may be doubted whether the declarations of Truth which we find in the form of direct answers to earnest questions, addressed immediately to the spiritual wants of living men, would have conveyed the same amount of instruction had they been part of a more formal discourse, or had they in any other way been separated from those personal associations in which we find them. When we read the Sermon on the Mount, or the valedictory discourses in the Gospel of St. John, we think chiefly of the general drift of meaning and seek for the explanation of the words in their interdependence, rather than in their reference or application; but when we study a conversation, such as that between Christ and Nicodemus, personal characteristics and relations immediately suggest

special meanings, and become the clue to guide us to the heart of the truth.

Little as we know, by direct information, of the personal history of the Jewish ruler, Nicodemus, we can yet estimate, with tolerable accuracy, his intellectual and religious advancement, and ascertain his point of standing in relation to Christianity. The conversation recorded is itself a clear revelation of character. Every word is full of suggestion, every turn of speech becomes luminous with personal reference if we bear in mind that the evangelist is preserving this conversation as an illustration of the Lord's doctrine. One who "*knew what was in man*" (ii., 25) was face to face with a man of very marked character: a representative man, a man whose spiritual state was the counterpart of many, and who specially needed for his salvation the divine skill of such a Teacher.

A single fact will often supply the key to a conversation. Prominent in the record of the evangelist stands the fact that Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The significance of the opening words will be found running through the whole dialogue. "*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*" A ruler, a master of Israel. Undoubtedly, therefore, not merely *one* of the Pharisees, but a distinguished man among them, a man, like Saul of Tarsus, thoroughly imbued with the Pharisaic spirit. He was, in all probability, an old man (verse 4). H

was recognised among his Pharisaic brethren as a leader, for he speaks in their name on his meeting Jesus. We may regard him as a typical Pharisee.

At the very commencement, then, of an investigation into the meaning of this important conversation between a Pharisee and Him whom the Pharisees were mainly instrumental in putting to death, it will be necessary to make some inquiry into the spiritual position which such a man would hold. The subject on which Jesus and Nicodemus conversed may be described, generally, as the nature of the kingdom of God, embracing, therefore, the vital points,—what was entrance into that kingdom, and what relation to it Jesus claimed for His own doctrine. What the Pharisees believed about the kingdom of God it is not difficult to discover.

From the time of the Maccabees, that is, for about a century and a half before the birth of Jesus Christ, there had existed, in Palestine, a sect of religious men, who professed a stricter rule of life and a more elevated devotion than the rest of the Jewish nation. Their earliest name of distinction was Chasidim, or *the Saints*. (Assideans, see First Book of Maccabees.) From this was derived their familiar title, Pharisees, *the separated*. The occasion of their origin, as a distinct class of religious zealots, would seem to have been the attempts of Antiochus Epiphanes to seduce the Jews from their national steadfastness, and

introduce among them heathen customs and regulations in contradiction to their law, and out of harmony with their national spirit. Like the English Puritans they were the result of a corrupt state of society and a period of national danger. They were Protestants. Their protest against encroaching error and increasing degeneracy was the ground of their religious name and life. While the national troubles lasted, while the *protest* was still demanded, as a bulwark against direct attacks from without, Phariseism was another name for patriotism and religious zeal. But when the political life of the people had decayed, when external peace had brought in the spirit of morbid religiousness instead of practical conscientiousness, then the Pharisee became the self-righteous formalist, instead of the spiritual hero.

When our Lord appeared, Jewish society was corrupt to the very core. The wealthy classes were deeply affected with the spirit of scepticism and the indifference of despair, by which the heathen world was at that time greatly possessed. The professedly religious men were worshippers of the letter, in bondage to forms and external regulations. The mass of the people, from whom both the rich and the religious held aloof, had become degraded and abandoned, sunk in profound ignorance, and both politically and morally disorganised. In such a state of things, a new preacher *must* direct his doctrine much

against the corruptions prevailing among the chief men. The multitude were the victims of their leaders. They had no knowledge or spiritual light wherewith to convict their false teachers. To release them from bondage to falsehood was one part of the work necessary for their salvation. Hence the Lord dealt much with the Pharisees.

Now, it was not every so-called Pharisee who could be said to represent the principles of the Pharisaic sect. There were some who were *strict* Pharisees, devoting themselves to carry out fully their doctrine and rules. Such, and such alone, were regarded as members of the Pharisaic *society*, and they undertook in the most solemn manner, almost after the fashion of Freemasons, in the presence of selected witnesses, three members, to observe the rules of the Pharisees and to promote Phariseeism. An able writer in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," Mr. Twistleton, has described at length the conditions of membership among the Pharisees. "One was," he says, "that a member should refrain from everything that was not tithed." The Mishna says, "He who undertakes to be *trustworthy* (a word with a technical Pharisaical meaning) tithes whatever he eats and whatever he sells, and whatever he buys, and does not eat with the people of the land." Their rules relating to the clean and unclean were most minute and oppressive. "*Anything* slaughtered by a heathen must be deemed unfit to be eaten like the carcase of an animal that had

died of itself, and like such carcase, pollutes the person who carries it." The fundamental principle of the Pharisees, common to them with all orthodox modern Jews, is that by the side of the *written* law, regarded as a summary of the principles and general laws of the Hebrew people, there was an *oral* law, to complete and explain the written law. It was an article of faith that in the Pentateuch there was no precept and no regulation, ceremonial, doctrinal, or legal, of which God had not given to Moses all explanations necessary for their application, with the order to transmit them by word of mouth. The classical passage in the Mishna on this subject is the following,—“Moses received the (oral) law from Sinai, and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue.” (Pirke Abôth, i.) Then, in addition to these traditions received from Moses, there were three other kinds. 1. Opinions on disputed points, which were the results of a majority of votes. 2. Decrees made by prophets and wise men in different ages, in conformity with a saying attributed to the men of the Great Synagogue,—“Be deliberate in judgment : train up many disciples, and *make a fence for the law* (that is by prohibition).” 3. Legal decisions of proper ecclesiastical authorities on disputed questions. And though all traditions were not ascribed to Moses as direct revelations, all were “invested with peculiar sanctity, so that, regarded collectively, the study of them

and the observance of them became as imperative as the study and observance of the precepts in the Bible."

The author of "Ecce Homo," describes, with admirable conciseness, the contrast between this legal party among the Jews and Jesus Christ. "The doctrine of the Scribes, Lawyers, and Pharisees, consisted in the denial of a present Spirit, and in the assertion of the paramount necessity of particular rules. They believed that the inspiring Power which had dwelt with their ancestors and made them virtuous was withdrawn, and they compiled out of the works of those ancestors an elaborate system of rules which might serve them for guidance in His absence."

On each of the points, therefore, which engaged our Lord Jesus in conversation with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, it is not difficult to understand the doctrines or principles which would be brought into antagonism.

1. As to the nature of the promised kingdom of heaven, and as to the mode of admission into its rights and blessings. Pharisees would believe that the whole was a question of privilege and special distinction. The kingdom itself was identified with the sphere of Judaistic righteousness. A strict Jew, a legally correct man, one whose righteousness, according to the prescription of the elders, judged by the standard of the law, was unimpeachable, was, *pro tanto*, a member of the kingdom, beyond all doubt would

enter into it and share its glory, whatsoever that glory might hereafter be found to comprehend, in the time of its revelation.

2. As to Regeneration, the work of the Spirit, personal salvation, it would seem as though the Pharisee had no definite doctrine whatever. They were as much in the dark, really, although they knew it not, as heathens who had no written revelation. There was no theory of *conversion* among them. They regarded religious life as obedience to rules. As to the commencement of that life, they had no conception of it as a supernatural thing. If there was a Spirit of God still living and working, He was to be found in the positive fulfilment of the letter of the law which had been communicated by Inspiration. Messiah, indeed, was expected by all Jews. Pharisees anticipated a *second Moses*, one who would be the vindicator and the glorifier of the Law, and who by exalting the Law would exalt the nation from its political decline, for "*this people who know not the law are cursed.*" They looked for no new *revelation* of truth; they had no thought of a work of Salvation to be wrought out in a personal Redeemer for mankind. The sacred books were complete. Revelation was already perfect. The holy life was clearly marked out. Whosoever believed in the elders hath everlasting life.

In contrast with such corruption and darkness Jesus placed the essential distinctions of Christianity

He dealt with a deceived and benighted soul. He invited a worshipper of a dead antiquity to the living faith of a Christian.

Miracles had not, for centuries, been witnessed in Israel. At last, it was reported widely through the land, that a prophet had appeared, doing wonderful works in God's name. John the Baptist did no miracle. His preaching startled the nation into something like new life, but the record with which he met the priests and Levites, when they asked him about his mission, so little satisfied the so-called religious men, that they held aloof from him, and were now settling down, after the temporary excitement, into their old self-complacency. But to the Jewish mind there was an awful appeal in *miracles*. The Jews are described by the Apostle Paul as characterised by a sign-seeking disposition. A wonderful *work* impressed them more powerfully than wonderful *words*. The leading Pharisees, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, must have heard of the miracles wrought by Jesus; had probably witnessed the proof of their reality; could not treat them as mere idle tales. They would hold conferences on this new question. How shall we act towards a teacher who professes to give such signs? Is he a genuine man? Is he *inspired*, in the sense in which one of the ancients was inspired, and, therefore, being a prophet, must we sit at his feet, adding his communications to the sacred books?

We are not told of any meeting of the council at which such questions were discussed ; but we are told that Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee, came to Jesus, as though he were fresh from such a conference, speaking, not for himself alone, but for others, whom he in some sense represented. May we not conjecture that the miracles wrought by Jesus were discussed in the Pharisaic council ; but that, after long debate, without chance of agreement, the subject was *shelved*. If Jesus was the inspired prophet He claimed to be, why did He not proclaim, in unmistakeable manner, His reverence for *the sacred books* ? Why did He mix with the people generally, ignorant and unrighteous as they were ? At the same time, there could be no reasonable doubt that *wonderful works* had been done. Some were disposed to speak favourably of the new Teacher. The majority, offended with His independence, would only consent to a postponement of the subject ; which meant, that no decision would be sought. It was, possibly, not long after such a meeting, that Nicodemus, whose mind had been greatly disturbed by the discussion, made his way to the private dwelling where Jesus stayed during His sojourn in Jerusalem. Quite possibly, it was the same night. We need not ascribe it to mere unmanly fear of his fellow-men, that the Pharisee waited until darkness hid him from public observation. Had he held no position of honour among the people, he might have

acted otherwise. His public character, as a master in Israel, and leading Pharisee, made it imperative upon him to be cautious. To seek Jesus after a discussion in the council, when his brethren could not agree how to regard the new doctrine, would be liable to misconstruction. Some would say that Nicodemus slighted the council, and desired, himself, to act independently of its authority. At the same time his mind craved satisfaction. He was so ill at ease that he must be rid of the doubts which troubled him. If Jesus had really *wrought miracles*, such a shelving of the question of His authority was unjust and irreligious. A personal interview, if it were strictly private, *might* be entirely satisfactory. If it were so, there could be no ill consequence in a subsequent divulging of it to the brethren.

The Lord's manner of receiving those who came to Him must have influenced their thoughts concerning Him. We can imagine Nicodemus, immediately on his admission to the presence of Jesus, feeling any lingering suspicion which he had of the Lord's genuine character at once dissipated. He looked into His face and doubted no more that, whoever He was, He was a true man, a very wise and holy man. That instantaneous impression would suggest the form of address. Nicodemus would immediately recognise the weakness of his own position, coming by night, in a stealthy, secret, manner, to visit one whose countenance and

whole demeanour spoke of candour, transparent simplicity, and the majesty of Truth. The appearance of meanness, and dishonour to Jesus, must be veiled. *First*, then, Jesus must be addressed as upon an equality with the leading teachers. *Next*, Nicodemus must not seem to be acting upon his own individual impulse, although he cannot call himself a deputation from the Pharisees. *Lastly*, there must be no hesitation, with such a man as Jesus evidently was, in acknowledging the genuineness of His miracles.

"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him."

There is a singular acuteness in these opening words. They are very characteristic. The Pharisee is in every syllable. Very little is admitted; and yet the way in which Jesus is addressed would have suited one that meant much more. The very title, "*Rabbi*," while it was perfectly respectful, being a title constantly used to Nicodemus himself, seemed to convey an invitation to fraternity. *We, Rabbis*, claim you as a brother *Rabbi*. We have considered your character; we have examined the report of your miracles; we have come to this conclusion, that you are a teacher come from God; for otherwise God would not have given you this wonderful power. There is some difficulty in deciding what exact meaning Nicodemus would attach to the words he used, "*come from God*," "*God with him*."

Certainly, he would not have employed the common term "*Rabbi*," or "*teacher*," had he thought of a super-human person, or had he supposed Jesus to hold a position quite independent of all other teachers. Possibly, his language was such as was commonly used of those *eminent in religion*. At least, it would very properly describe a prophet, coming to the people with a special message in God's name. It is doubtful if Nicodemus would have used such words concerning Jesus before he saw Him. At all events, the Pharisees, as a body, would not have agreed to send such a message. "*Thou hast come from God—a teacher.*" The miracles dictated the former part of the sentence; the reserve of the Pharisees, the latter. "*Thou hast come from God,*" we should expect him to say, *a prophet, a seer, an inspired man*;—but he softens down the term, "*a master,*" "*a teacher!*" There was evidently a struggle in the Pharisee's mind, in the presence of the Lord Jesus, between his faith and his pride. He *could* not reject the miracles, and they seemed to say Jesus is come from God and must be received with entire confidence; he could not, at the same time, renounce himself immediately, and sit at the feet of the stranger, without an appeal to his own position as a master in Israel for his judgment. The attitude assumed is, therefore, that of great respect, *with reserve*. The attempt to keep that reserve in the presence of Jesus betrayed the Pharisee into incon-

sistency. He *meant* only to admit the miracles and the claim to be a Rabbi. He *said* more. He revealed to One, who "*knew what was in man*," and could read the secret workings of his heart, that he was perplexed, that he was far yet from the child-like simplicity of a real disciple; that he had come not merely to do honour to the "*teacher come from God*," but to *himself*, as a representative of the Pharisees, before whose individual judgment Jesus might lay His claims for criticism, and His doctrine for approval.

We can believe that Nicodemus was prepared to hear from Jesus, of some special message or revelation of Divine Truth with which as a "*teacher come from God*" he was commissioned; but we may doubt if it entered for a moment into his mind, trained in the Pharisaic school, that the reception on his part of the new doctrine or message, would require any kind of change in himself; that anything, which Jesus could teach, would obscure, or supersede in any sense, his own Rabbinical learning. This opening of the conversation is the key to the whole. Nicodemus must be dealt with exactly according to his spiritual position. Such a man in such a state of mind could be answered, by a Divine messenger, only as he was answered.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (Verse 3.)

Apart from the substance of these words, the form must immediately arrest attention, as unexpected, and peculiar. It is an answer; and, yet, it appears inapplicable to the saying to which it replies. One would have thought that our Lord's rejoinder would take up the point of His authority, His coming from God, His miracles, which Nicodemus acknowledged; but, instead of an invitation, on the Lord's part, to such a discussion of His claims, His answer shoots, like a stream of light from heaven, into the Pharisee's conscience. Evidently, therefore, it was not the *form* of Nicodemus' words to which Jesus answered, but *their spirit*. Here I am, said this ruler of the Jews, prepared to try whether your doctrine will meet my ideas of a Divinely-inspired teacher or not; now, speak to me, and let me know what is your message. Jesus did actually answer that real meaning in Nicodemus' words. "*Verily, verily, I say unto THEE.*" No reference is made to the "*we*" which Nicodemus employed. Jesus is dealing with an individual soul. I will give to "*thee*" a moot point. I will put before "*thee*" a crucial doctrine, which thou must either accept or reject, and upon which I rest my whole teaching as a basis. The Lord declares the necessity, in every case, of *a new birth, or birth from above*, and He takes for granted, that whoever is sincere, in seeking Divine teaching, makes it his aim, to "*see the kingdom of God.*" Now, there is no allusion in

Nicodemus' words to *seeing the kingdom of God*, but the expression would be quite familiar to an intelligent Jew. Undoubtedly, every religious man of that time would possess some kind of doctrine about the kingdom of God. John the Baptist "came preaching, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." No one protested against that preaching, that it dealt with a subject away from the popular thoughts. All expected a kingdom. Even those who rejected the counsel of God in John's discourses, still believed that there was coming a time when the kingdom of God would be made manifest. Most Jews understood by that kingdom the restoration of Israel to national strength and prosperity, and the propagation of Judaism throughout the world, under Messiah, who should be King and Lord over the whole earth. Pharisees believed that they, as main supporters of the Law, examples of righteousness, would hold a chief place in the kingdom. Our Lord's answer to Nicodemus was, therefore, most direct and personal. You came to me to talk about my doctrine. You believe that I have something to say concerning the kingdom of God. I have a message for you. You know that it is already announced by John the Baptist, that the kingdom of God is at hand. You will not deny that it is right to expect that kingdom speedily. Now, this is the message which I bring to you, a ruler of the Jews, directly from God, concerning His kingdom,—

"*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

The words used could not be mistaken. "*Except a man be born again (or from above),*" must have struck upon the Pharisee's ears as a very startling announcement. For, in the first place, the verb used by the Lord could have no other meaning than *birth*. The idea conveyed is not merely that of a process of *change (becoming)*, but that of *origination*. In classical authors the same word is used, but is seldom found in a metaphorical sense, and when it is employed of metaphorical generation, the metaphor is distinctly marked. Had our Lord chosen the verb "*to become*," instead of the verb "*to be born*," he would have conveyed quite a different meaning ; he would have said, "Except a man *become a new man*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus could not then have felt any perplexity. He would have understood that the Lord insisted on the necessity of *change* ; but he would not suppose that the change required was anything more than the *development* of religious character, which a Pharisee, as well as any other, would teach ought to be carried to perfection. But Jesus says,— "*Except a man be begotten again (or from above), he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" Nicodemus is perplexed. Did his Jewish nationality *stand in his way* ; and not, as he always had believed, *help* him to claim the kingdom ? What doctrine could Jesus teach

concerning the kingdom of God, that He seemed discard the rights of Israel, and make new terms admission ?

But the Lord qualified the verb which He employ by an adverb, which must have arrested his audito attention, however little he seized its significan Our translators have rendered this adverb "again Now, although this word was originally used as adverb of place, and would, therefore, in early classic writings, be very exactly rendered "*from above*," y there can be no doubt that it subsequently obtain a more abstract signification, and (like our o "*thoroughly*,") lost its objective meaning to a gre extent, being employed generally in the sense "*fr the first*," "*from the beginning*." Plato uses it with t definite article, "*those from above*," that is, ancestor and again, "*things from above*," that is, first principle Demosthenes qualifies with it the verb "*to examin* meaning, "*to examine thoroughly*," "*from the beginning* Plato also uses it with the verb "*to begin*," meaning, begin "*afresh*." The adverb used would not, therefo *of itself*, necessarily convey to the mind of Nicodem the idea of a *heavenly* birth, a *spiritual* work of ne creation. But it would so strengthen the meaning the verb, that it is wonderful an intelligent hear should not have been immediately convinced that metaphorical sense was alone intended. Had o Lord spoken literally, he would not have add

anything to the verb "*to be born*;" but, by the use of the adverb, He drew attention to the character of the change required, insisting on its *thoroughness*; and that should have suggested immediately to Nicodemus that the birth was one which concerned the spiritual nature alone. A mind trained in theology ought not to have found difficulty in such a metaphor. We can account for Nicodemus' obtuseness only on the ground of his self-complacency. He knew nothing of a spiritual change which could be called a birth of new life. The Lord used the strongest language, because the mind to which he appealed required rousing into inquisitiveness, immediate deliverance from the inertia of self-content.

Conversation is a great quickener of thought. The mind is instructed and advanced by its own misapprehensions being corrected and removed. We are prone to be too easily satisfied with an inadequate conception, which in the presence of another, or by our own attempt at expression, is at once detected. Nicodemus must have answered himself, the moment he gave utterance to his question. He had only to put his thought into words to see its absurdity.

"Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

We cannot believe that this reply was given at all in the spirit of mockery or impertinence. Nor was it

mere beating the air. When we fail to seize the exact meaning of words, the mind may be thrown into perplexity, by the suggestion of several meanings at once, and, driven to make some reply, we lay hold of the first that comes to our lips ; although conscious that it is quite inadequate, we utter it as an experiment.

Plato, in his dialogues, represents Socrates often calling out just such an answer as Nicodemus gave to Jesus. With relentless irony, Socrates drives the speaker to eat his words, or to confess that he is fairly baffled. But Jesus was not engaged in an intellectual contest. He dealt with an immortal soul, unto salvation. May we not suppose that the idea of *birth* stirred some strange thoughts in Nicodemus, which he did not care to utter, concerning philosophical speculations with which he was familiar ? Did Jesus teach a doctrine of transmigration ? Did He mean that a man must die, and after death be born again in another body ? But how would he remain the same man ? Identity was the great enigma. How can a man be born again, *the same man* that he was, except he be born into the same body ? How can the same body be born twice, and remain the same ? And, then, however it might be with any man, after death, still, during life, the man himself can have no power to effect such a change *upon himself*. Some such thoughts may have crowded into the mind. The word translated

"*old*," need not be taken to indicate that Nicodemus saw special difficulty in the new birth being experienced by an *old* man, in distinction from a *young* man. He is speaking from his own standpoint. New birth is inconceivable in any man. How could an old man, like myself, be born again? "Can he enter the *second time* into his mother's womb and be born?" The consideration of age is dropped, and the "*second time*" is put forth as the essence of the difficulty. Some have suggested that, like the woman of Samaria, when she tried to turn the "*Prophet's*" conversation from her past life to the dispute between Jews and Samaritans concerning the place of acceptable worship, the Pharisee Nicodemus shrank from conversation about regeneration, and would fain have covered his retreat by a flippant remark. This, however, seems scarcely consistent with Nicodemus' attitude, and we rather conclude that he was sincerely perplexed; but, having to reply something, blurted out questions which, instantly they were put into words, must have made him ashamed. At the same time, such an answer from such a man meant the opposite of defiance or challenge to Jesus. The Lord received it as a confession of perplexity, and as indicating his hearer's willingness to be enlightened. He passed by the carelessness of the answer without rebuke. He condescendingly repeated and unfolded His meaning.

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Now, in this answer, there is a re-affirmation of the necessity of second birth; but, at the same time, by use of other terms, the doctrine takes a more theological form. *Entrance into the kingdom of God* is now brought forward, as the main thought. The new birth is identified with such an entrance into the kingdom. And while the same word is employed of the birth as before, and fleshly birth is even compared with and distinguished from spiritual birth, in both cases the same word being used, still, the Lord's opening words in this answer must have dispelled all mystery from the hearer's mind on the mere question of verbal difficulty. He could not, any longer, doubt that the birth referred to was not physical; although none the less real. Entrance into the kingdom of God he could at once connect with advanced age, and disconnect from physical change. But what new light would dawn on the mind of the Pharisee, when, instead of the term, used before, "*born again*," the Lord substituted, in this re-affirmation of His doctrine,

the fuller expression, "*born of water and of the Spirit!*" We cannot believe that an intelligent man would fail to perceive that birth of such a kind, though it might be *analogous* to fleshly birth, was still *dissimilar*. A *real* birth Jesus evidently meant, but not a birth like that of a child from the mother. The two words "*water*" and "*spirit*" must explain the birth. As to the former, a Jew could not be long perplexed. He was quite familiar with ceremonial worship. He could not have read the Old Testament Scriptures, and have missed the application there of the figure to spiritual cleansing. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." (Psalm, li., 2.) "Wash you, make you clean." (Isaiah, i., 16,) &c. Moreover, there would seem to be no doubt among learned Jewish writers, that a purification by water was, at the time when our Lord appeared, part of the *ceremony* of admission into the Old Testament covenant. Maimonides says, "Israel was admitted into the covenant by three things, namely, by circumcision, *baptism*, and sacrifice. So, whenever a Gentile desires to enter into the covenant of Israel, and place himself under the wings of the Divine Majesty, and take the yoke of the Law upon him, he must be circumcised and *baptised*, and bring a sacrifice." This is confirmed by the Talmud. *Circumcision* would not be an adequate distinction, at all times; for in cases of proselytes from the Egyptians, and Ishmaelites, and

other nations, bordering upon Canaan, circumcision had preceded adoption of the Jewish religion, being a common practice among them. *Baptism* would, therefore, be added, in their cases, and strictly observed. John the Baptist found no difficulty in placing baptism, as a kind of initiatory rite, preparatory to the kingdom of heaven, which he announced to be at hand. It was not, perhaps, regarded by the people as a ceremony of *admission* into the kingdom, but it certainly was submitted to, as a token of repentance and change of life, *in the expectation* of the kingdom, which should shortly appear. Nicodemus, with all the Pharisees, had stood aloof from John the Baptist. They had not been baptised themselves, with the baptism of repentance unto the kingdom of God; but, it was not because they denied the *propriety of baptism*, but because they denied the *necessity of repentance, in their own cases*, in order to admission into, or preparation for, the kingdom. When Jesus, therefore, proclaimed the new birth to be a birth "*of water*," His meaning would be immediately understood. He pointed to water as the sign of purification. He demanded *birth "of water,"* as an explanation of *new birth*; that is, the newness, or thoroughness, of the new birth must be such as would be represented by the newness, or thoroughness, of cleansing by water. And, when He connects, in the sentence, with the allusion to water, the idea of

entrance into the kingdom of God, He carries the mind of his hearer, at once, to the practice of the Jews in admitting their proselytes, and so defines more clearly the birth of water to mean *baptism in water in order to admission to the kingdom*. In short, He said, *Except a man be a completely new man* (as one baptised professes to be), *he cannot enter the kingdom*. The *kind* of change was not described by the water, but only the *fact* and the *degree*. It must be change, and thorough change, such as baptism represents. The second word defines the nature of the change,—
“*Born of THE SPIRIT.*”

Now, before passing on to the consideration of this birth of the Spirit, a word must be said on the interpretation given to the words “*of water,*” by those who see in this passage the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration*. Dr. Pusey takes a great deal of pains to show that a large majority of commentators, as he says, “fifteen centuries of ecclesiastical authority,” apply the Lord’s words to baptism, as *the external instrument* of regeneration. “One may argue,” he thinks, “that our Saviour added the words ‘*of water,*’ with a view that His Church should thence learn the truth, which she has transmitted, that ‘*regeneration*’ is the gift of God, bestowed by Him, in this life, *in baptism only*. Indeed, the opposite exposition, invented by the Swiss teachers, was so manifestly a mere weapon by which to demolish a Papal argument for

the absolute necessity of baptism, that it had har-
 been worth commenting upon ; but that no error e-
 stops at its first stage." &c. Now, it is unfair to
 the whole stress of the argument, in a discussion
 this passage, on the application of the words '
water' to baptism. No one can deny that the o-
 possible reference of water in such a connection m-
 be to baptism, or at least to ablution. The real g
 of the controversy must be sought in the relat-
 position, logically considered, of "*water*," and "*spir-*
 Did the Lord mean that a *birth of water* was, in a
 sense, distinct from a *birth of the Spirit* ? Surely,
 that point, the language is decisive ; the two wor-
 "*water*" and "*spirit*," being governed by one p-
 position. ("*of water and the Spirit*.") Admitting t-
 a reference is made to baptism in the term "*wate-*
 and that, had it been used by itself, the meani-
 would have been "except a man be baptise
 certainly the natural interpretation of the wh-
 expression will be that "*water*" simply denotes
fact of baptism, and "*Spirit*" describes *the r*
nature of the baptism ; not that "*water*" and "*Spir-*
 are to be placed on the same level as *two constitue*
in one act. Pusey says, if the Lord did *not* me-
 baptismal regeneration, why did He use words whi-
 could be so interpreted and have been so interpret-
 by the Church ? On the other hand, it may be ask-
 if the Lord *did* mean baptismal regeneration, why c

He, in teaching a Pharisee how he should enter the kingdom of heaven, so pointedly insist on the *spiritual* nature of the new birth; so much so, that, in repeating His doctrine, He omits altogether all reference to baptism, and speaks of the birth as of the Spirit alone? Is it not then much more consistent with the whole conversation to take the words "*of water*" as denoting *the fact and degree* of change, namely, such as washing in baptism *represents*, a complete renewal of the man; and the words "*of Spirit*," as denoting *the kind and cause* of the change, that is, that it is a change *of* the spirit of man, *by* the Spirit of God. Then the whole would be interpreted thus,—"*Except a man be thoroughly changed, by the Spirit, so that he could be baptised, as a sign of that change*, (as a proselyte would be baptised as a sign of his change,) &c.

There could not be much difficulty in the mind of Nicodemus as to the meaning of "*Pneuma*," "*Spirit*." A reader of the Old Testament could not suppose it to bear any other meaning than "*the Holy Spirit*." On the first page of his Septuagint, Nicodemus read, "And *the Spirit* of God moved upon the face of the waters." Ezekiel's vision must have often been in his thoughts. He remembered how the dry bones lived, "and the breath (*the Spirit, Pneuma*) came into them and they lived." A spiritual man, a man possessed of the Spirit of God in a special sense, could not have

been a remote idea to a religious Jew. ("The *spiritual man*, is mad." "Pneumatophoros." Hosea, ix., 7. Prophetic inspiration was a familiar fact of the past though not of the present. Surely, a Jew would not read his Old Testament as teaching him that prophet's anointing, or a priest's ablution, was anything more than a *sign* of Divine Grace. If he did so read it, it would make him, not a humble Simeon "waiting for the consolation of Israel," but a proud Pharisee, resting on external ordinances and ceremonial righteousness. The rites of the ancient economy were never made essential, but were entirely figurative and typical. The prophets received a special mission to proclaim the necessity of spiritual religion, and its independence of external observances. The Pharisee with whom Jesus conversed, might be tempted by his education and Pharisaic tendencies, to suppose some external rite necessary to salvation. He and his fellow-religionists had no conception of spiritual gifts as freely bestowed, and dependent simply on the willingness and faith of the recipient. *Privilege*, was their watchword. *Separation from others*, was their cardinal doctrine and rule of life. We cannot believe that, to such a hearer, Jesus would speak of water as though it were a *constituent in salvation*. He must have employed "Spirit," not as a correlative with "water," but as denoting the *substance* of which "water" might be taken as the sign or *form*.

If it be asked, on the other hand, why then did the Lord speak of baptism at all, the answer is not difficult. *First, and chiefly*, because He would set forth the absolute necessity of a Jew's renouncing his old position in order to his becoming a Christian, which Nicodemus would not have included, of his own accord, in the idea of spiritual birth. *Next*, because by using the term "*water*," Jesus at once dispelled from the mind of his hearer all doubts as to the possibility of a second birth being a *real* birth. Though an old man could not enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, he could enter into water, and be born, like a proselyte. And, *lastly*, the connection of water with the kingdom of God would be a preparation of Nicodemus' mind for the change from the old dispensation to the new; circumcision being manifestly dropped, a *water initiation* put in the place of it. But, just as the strictest Jew, if he added nothing to the Old Testament, would regard circumcision simply as a rite, and not at all as an instrument by which any spiritual change was effected, so none but a formalist would, under the new system, place water baptism on a higher level. The Apostle Paul spoke, as a Jew, as well as a Christian, when he said,—
 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in

the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God (Romans, ii., 28-9.)

Passing on to the sixth verse, we find there nothing spoken of as constituting admission into the kingdom of God but spiritual birth. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" When flesh is born of flesh, what is the birth? It is the beginning of a *fleshly* life. It would be utterly wrong to say that the fleshly birth of a child from the mother is the product of fleshly causes alone because that which is born is more than flesh. Jesus therefore, is not speaking of the *origin* of that which is born; but He speaks of the relationship of birth to the way of illustration simply of *the nature of the life born*. A *fleshly birth* means the beginning of a *life in the flesh*. A *spiritual birth*, on the other hand, means the beginning of a *spiritual life*—the beginning of its manifestation and development. The same word, it is true, is employed, both of the flesh and of the spirit ("*of the flesh*," "*of or from the Spirit*"); but there can be no stress laid on the preposition, "*of*," otherwise indeed, a materialistic view of the Spirit would be implied. The relation is, in both cases, that of antecedence; and for the purpose of the context, that would be sufficient. Certainly, if the Lord intended to press the figure of the birth to its utmost extent He would not have rebuked Nicodemus as He did "*Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born*

again." "*Marvel not,*" because I lay no stress on the idea of birth, but on the newness of life, and you ought to know, as a theologian, that a new life implies a new birth. You are looking away from that part of the doctrine which you *can* understand, and you are perplexing yourself with that which you *cannot* understand. A man that is *born* of the Spirit knows that the Spirit manifests itself in him, because he *lives* in the Spirit. (If Jesus taught baptismal regeneration, why did He not teach it at this point more plainly, and say, If a man be born of water he is born of the Spirit?) There is no need to be perplexed. You see the *life*, though you see not the *birth*. Then follows the illustration which is intended to show yet more forcibly, that there is no cause for Nicodemus' wondering and questioning state of mind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

A question of some importance here arises. Are we to translate "*Pneuma*," "wind" or "spirit?" Bengel says, very decidedly, the latter. And there is much to support his view. Why should the word have a different meaning from the ordinary rendering, "*spirit*," except the context requires it. The verse reads quite clearly, and with a stricter interpretation, thus,—“The Spirit breathes where it pleases, and thou hearest the voice of it, but thou dost not know whence it comes

and whither it goes. So it is in the case of every one born of the Spirit." Now, this seems quite intelligible. Our Lord may refer to the phenomena of Inspiration ; or, to the ordinary working of the Holy Spirit, which a religious Jew would quite understand. Thou hearest words which declare to thee the presence of the Holy Spirit ; but thou canst not trace the origin of His work, or whither He directs His influences. Or, "*the spirit*" might be taken, more generally, for the spirit of man, and the illustration be adduced of the soul (as we should say) manifesting itself by the voice ; though, then, "*coming and going*" would apply to the breath, or the voice, rather than to "*the Spirit*," which seems to be the proper antecedent. Against the rendering in the English version, there are several strong objections. *First. Pneuma*—breath or spirit—is not the word we should expect to be used for "*the wind* ;" but, rather, "*anemos*." *Secondly.* The verb employed is certainly an unexpected word to denote the *blowing* of wind, though it might be so used. *Thirdly.* The personification of the wind (*where it listeth or willetth*) is forced, and, in the connection, certainly doubtful. *Fourthly.* The use of the word "*voice*" (phoné), is startling, for we should rarely speak of the wind's *voice*. *Lastly.* There seems abruptness in the conclusion of the verse, if it be so rendered. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." The comparison must be somewhat stretched

to fit such an illustration, for there seems only one very general point illustrated, namely, that as we believe in the existence of wind, notwithstanding the mystery there is in its movements; so, we must believe in the existence of the Spirit, though we cannot understand His working. But it is not the *existence* of the Spirit which is at all in question. Nicodemus did not doubt that there was a Holy Spirit. The mystery of spiritual agency did not puzzle him. He was marvelling at the idea of a *birth* of the Spirit, and especially how a man full grown, and, like himself, religiously educated, could be said to *need* to be born of the Spirit. Jesus reminds him that there is, in fact, no more difficulty in believing that a man is *born* of the Spirit, than in believing that the Spirit *acts at all* through man. You hear the Spirit speak, you know nothing more than what you hear. So it is with a man *born* of the Spirit. He hears the voice. He is conscious of the life. But he knows no more. He is born; and when he is born, he has a voice; he speaks, he shows all the signs of life like a new-born child. And there ought to be no more difficulty in believing that he is born of the Spirit, than in a little child's believing that it is born into the world. On the whole, therefore, there is less forcing of the words if we translate *Pneuma*, "*the Spirit*," as before. And, thus, we are brought to this point. Admission into the kingdom of God is new birth. New birth is such a

complete change as would be signified by baptism. That change is a spiritual change produced by the Spirit of God. One who is born of the Spirit is conscious of new life, breathes and works as a new creature, the Spirit of God being in him as the breath of his new life.

Nicodemus cannot plead want of clearness in the words. The doctrine is distinctly before him. He is yet, however, far from understanding the relation of such a doctrine to his own spiritual state.

"Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be?"

Here, again, our English version weakens the original. The word employed should be rendered "*come to pass.*" "How can these things, of which you speak, *become facts* of my own experience?" There was no intention, on the Pharisee's part, to dispute the truth of the Lord's assertions; but there was a desire for *practical guidance*. Had the words been simply an exclamation, betokening doubt, they would certainly have met with a different answer. As they were a humble admission of helplessness, and prayer for guidance, the answer was, as we should anticipate, a much fuller statement of Christian doctrine, an appeal to faith, at once a guidance to the understanding, and an invitation to the heart.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?"

Hast thou taught any other doctrine? Hast thou taught any other view of the kingdom of God? Hast thou thyself never understood that that kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, that admission into it must be a spiritual regeneration? Surely, this answer of the Lord's is quite sufficient to shew the impossibility of the sacramentarian interpretation of new birth. What was there in Nicodemus' doctrine, as a master in Israel, which *could* lead him to the conclusion that "*Regeneration is bestowed in this life in baptism only?*" Would not the old prophets rise up against him, if he taught such a narrow salvation? The gist of the Saviour's answer was this,—My doctrine is not something antagonistic to the Old Testament. I am come to show you the Gospel which has been preached from the beginning. You, as a master in Israel, ought not require to be told, that spiritual regeneration is the doctrine of Moses and of all the prophets.

The exposition of Christian truth which follows, beginning with the third "*Verily, verily,*" and ending with the twenty-first verse, reflects much light on the previous conversation. Some have supposed the interview with Nicodemus to end with verse fifteen; but for this they have no reason except their own feeling of the unsuitableness of the words in the lips of Jesus. The "*After these things*" of verse twenty-second seems decisive, pointing to the resumption of narrative, and, therefore, to the close of

the conversation. We shall see, by a rapid review these eleven verses, that their connection is distinct to allow of the interposition of another speaker.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."

These opening words of our Lord's answer must be expected to contain the key to the rest, especially as they are introduced by a "*Verily, verily,*" but the exact meaning is not immediately evident. Why the plural pronoun employed? Why is the "*we*" changed for the "*I*" in the very next verse? Bengel says, the Lord is speaking of Himself as one with the Spirit. We, that is, *the Spirit and the Son*. But is not this a strained interpretation for which the mind of Nicodemus would be totally unprepared; and which, even if afterwards taught, would not be introduced so abruptly? We cannot take it as the *pluralis majestatis*, as the Lord would not in this case have immediately resumed the first person. The meaning must be sought elsewhere. Is it not found in the preceding expression.—"*Art thou a master of Israel?*" What did Nicodemus profess to teach? That which God's messengers and witnesses declared Jesus claimed to be among those who spoke what they knew to be Divine words, and testified what they had actually seen by Divinely-given vision.

He had rebuked Nicodemus that he was ignorant of the doctrine of the Spirit, and why was he thus ignorant? Because, like all the Pharisees, he was unwilling to receive the testimony which God gave to His inspired servants. "Ye do not receive our witness," that is, the deficiency is in yourselves, and that deficiency is moral and spiritual.

If the eleventh verse be thus explained, we seem to have found a key to the difficulties of verse twelve. *"If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not: how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"*

Here it is implied that the teaching, up to this point, was in some sense a teaching of earthly things; that the further teaching, asked for by Nicodemus, would be a teaching of heavenly things. What are "*earthly things*," in distinction from "*heavenly things*?" Certainly, *Regeneration*, regarded as a work of the Spirit, is as much a heavenly thing as any other Divine secret. Its connection with man, as the subject of it, does not make it an earthly thing. It is difficult to conceive what "*heavenly things*" could be a greater trial of faith than the work of the Spirit in *Regeneration*. Again, therefore, we must seek the explanation in the context. It is suggested by the word "*witness*," or "*testimony*," of the preceding verse. The distinction seems to be between things *already on the earth*, and things *in the heavens* which only one who has ascended into heaven can speak of as what

he has known and seen. "*Earthly things*," may, then, very fairly represent things already *revealed*; "*heavenly things*," things still *secret* in the mind and purpose of God. If I have told you things which already may be found in the revelation now on the earth, and, yet, though ye may confirm them by appealing to that revelation, ye do not believe, how then will ye believe, how will ye be likely to believe, if I tell you things simply on my own authority, as a Divine witness, who has heard and seen the things that are in heaven?

That He is able thus to declare heavenly things, the Lord distinctly affirms in the next verse; but the force of His appeal to Nicodemus lies in the contrast between the conditions of faith, as regards "*earthly things*," on the one hand, and as regards "*heavenly things*," on the other. In the one case, Jesus did not require faith; on the ground merely of His individual authority and mission, but on the agreement rather between His witness and the witness of those towards whom, as a master of Israel, Nicodemus professed faith.

But, having thus rebuked unbelief in his hearer, the Lord passes on to set forth His own personal claims. He is the revealer of heavenly things; He is the faithful witness; He is the greatest of all those who have spoken what they have heard, and testified what they have seen.

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

There is often great force in the conjunctions of Scripture. The conjunction "*and*," here, is very expressive. How shall ye believe? "*And, yet*," you must believe; for an object of faith is about to be set before you. The claim made in this thirteenth verse is unmistakeable. Ascent into heaven! Descent from heaven! Abiding existence in heaven! Even, if we suppose that the term "*Son of Man*," had no special significance to the ears of Nicodemus, such claims to heavenly authority could not be misunderstood. Jesus could be speaking of no one but Himself. His manner would leave no doubt of that. And, now, He astonishes His hearer by declaring His knowledge of heavenly things, as one who is not of this world. He came from heaven. He is Himself heavenly. Of course, an intelligent Jew would understand that Jesus, in speaking thus, claimed to be received as the Messiah. Daniel's prophecy, of "*the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven*," and receiving "*dominion and glory, and a kingdom which shall not be destroyed*," had made all learned men familiar with the title "*Son of Man*," as applied to the Messiah. They could not have overlooked its meaning, that the Messiah should be, at the same time, heavenly in His glory, and human in His intimate union with man. Now, there-

fore, the conversational form of discourse seems to be lost in the more emphatic and elevated style, suited to declarations of heavenly things. The following verses cannot be understood except in the light of the Gospel narrative. They were sayings given to Nicodemus to try his faith. They found their full interpretation when the mind of Him who came down from heaven could be read, not only in His discourses, but also in the facts of His heavenly history. Let us, then, write out, in the language of the Christian revelation, the meaning of these verses, that we may see what these heavenly things are which, like Nicodemus, we are invited to believe!

There is One who, being the Son of Man, is yet Divine, "*who is in heaven.*"

We cannot attach any lower meaning to the language. Nicodemus may not have been prepared for such an idea, but the Apostle John, who placed the conversation in its proper position in the gospel, knew that such words would harmonise with the opening verse of his narrative,—"*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;*" and with the title which was given to Jesus,—"*The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father.*" The substantive verb thus employed must point to absolute existence. Besides, the mere phraseology of the verse bears out such an interpretation. "*No one hath ascended into heaven;*" not simply,

no *man*, but no *person*, no *created being*. Evidently, by ascent into heaven, is not meant any physical ascent, or translation of an earthly being to another sphere, but spiritual ascent into the region of the Infinite and Divine. "*He that came down from heaven*" would, therefore, signify, not He that visibly descended from the clouds, but He that *condescended* from a Divine height to the level of man. Therefore, when such a One is described as "*He which is in heaven*," the meaning must be "*He whose eternal existence is in the sphere of the Divine*." This was a proclamation of Christ's divinity to those who were able to receive it.

But the Lord immediately adds, to this assertion of heavenly glory, an announcement, which invited the faith of His hearer to look for that glory in the facts of His earthly history.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Here an earthly fact of the past is made to suggest the nature of another earthly fact of the future. And this future fact is taken as the point of faith where the human soul is united with Him who is in heaven. We have advanced, then, from the declaration of a Divine Person to that of a Divine Person *becoming an object of faith*. The Son of Man must be so set before men

that they shall be able to believe in Him, that up their believing in Him shall depend their eternal life. They shall be drawn out of earth into heaven. It is in Him who is in heaven. They shall believe in Him who is lifted up. Plainly, the force of the verb "*lifted up*" in both cases, must be sought in the idea of *faith*, for the exaltation is, *in order that*, "whosoever believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

But why was the comparison made between the act of Moses and the lifting up of Christ, the Son of Man? Now, the act of Moses was, beyond all doubt, a Divinely-ordained act. It was not a human device; it was not a corollary from previous commandments. It was a special and singular appointment. The people were smitten and dying. God purposed to save them. But the salvation must be, not a mere external act; it must be at the same time, God's work of mercy as well as the people's work of faith, for salvation by faith is the salvation of the soul and not of the body merely—new spiritual life as well as rescue from death. The brazen serpent was a material object, and, therefore, could not be believed in; but the lifting up of the brazen serpent by Moses, in accordance with the Divine commandment, and on purpose to set forth the promise of mercy, was a spiritual act which appealed to faith. The object of faith was not the serpent, but God's Word, held up and held out, in *connection with* a material object, in condescension.

the weakness of dying men. The Son of Man must be lifted up, an object of faith, as plainly, as conspicuously, an object of faith, as the serpent was an object of sight! Is it possible to read such words, and doubt that the Lord is anticipating His crucifixion? Looking to the language itself, we cannot attach any other meaning to it. The serpent in the wilderness was lifted up upon a pole. We take "*lifted up the serpent*," literally, to refer to the act of Moses in raising the pole. In no reasonable sense, then, could we say of a man "he shall be lifted up," as the serpent was lifted up, except in such sense as crucifixion. That Nicodemus understood the allusion thus, may be gathered as probable from the fact that the saying would seem to have become known and discussed among the people. When the Lord at the Passover, after His public entrance into Jerusalem among the waving palm branches and thousands of the population, discoursed concerning His approaching glorification, He said, "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" Such a form of expression, "*if I be lifted up*," seems to imply that the prediction was familiar to the people. And so we should gather from the answer of the multitude, "How sayest thou, (not as we should expect—'*if I be lifted up*'—but, exactly in the same words as used to Nicodemus,) *the Son of Man must be lifted up.*" Now, the Evangelist affirms, "*This he said signifying what*

death He should die." Is it too much, then, to conclude, that Nicodemus and the people generally, to whom the Lord's conversation would be reported, understood by "*lifted up*," crucifixion? Now, whether or not, in this allusion to the brazen serpent, we must resort to the typical interpretation, and suppose that the serpent was a recognised symbol of Redemption, seems a question rather beside the exact purpose of the Lord's words, and, being one of considerable difficulty, need not here interrupt the course of exposition. The "*as*" and "*so*" seem abundantly satisfied if we take the gist of the comparison to be the conspicuously setting forth of the object of faith. What Nicodemus needed was to understand that the Son of Man would be distinctly and above all others, placed before his faith. The suggestion of an exaltation, through crucifixion, was calculated to try that faith; but the words which followed, addressed, as they were, to the heart, bid the hearer patiently wait for light, which, if he loved it as one that desired salvation, would certainly be given.

"*For (taking up the 'whosoever' of the previous verse) God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*"

The lifting up of the brazen serpent was a proclamation of Divine love and mercy to the *Israelites*,

the lifting up of the Son of Man was a proclamation of love *to the world!* And if the announcement of this world-embracing love explains the universality of faith as the condition of life, so the love itself explains the lifting up of the Son of Man. "He *gave* His only begotten Son." Precisely the same form of words is used in both verses,—"*That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" We are led, therefore, to refer back the word "*gave*" to the "*lifted up*" of verse fourteen. He gave His only begotten Son *to be lifted up*, in order that He might become *an object of faith*. Such a concentration of Love to the world in one act, as well as in one person, can be explained only by regarding the crucifixion as the central fact of Christianity. We must seek in the Cross of Christ the love of God to man, and man's eternal life offered to faith. The remainder of the Lord's sayings to Nicodemus help us to interpret the Cross.

"*For* (again taking up the main idea, God loved the world, and not a portion of it merely,) *God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through Him might be saved.*"

The Jews' idea of Divine love was apt to be falsified by national pride. The Pharisees, especially, taught a doctrine of election which was subversive of the Scripture, and inconsistent with the perfection of God. They represented Jewish privilege as given

in order to distinguish Jews as the special objects of God's love, and, therefore, to adjudge the rest of the world excluded from that love. But the original promise to Abraham was, "*In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" Therefore, the blessing of Abraham was given that it might "*come upon the Gentiles.*" Election was in order to universal Grace. The Messiah expected by Pharisees was one who should condemn and punish the world; a Jewish champion, to carry out the Jewish privilege against all others. But the Son of God is a Saviour, not a destroyer. The lifting up of the Son of Man, for which He has come into the world, is salvation ("*that the world through Him might be saved.*") We are pointed to a salvation, not only embodied in a person, but wrought by that person; for the words "*through Him,*" would be out of place, except they signified that the Son of God came into the world to effect its salvation. As it is distinctly affirmed, in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, that Jesus Christ is an object of faith to eternal life by His being lifted up, we are, surely, forced to the conclusion that the world is saved, in some way, by the crucifixion.

And the faith which looks at Jesus, lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness, is the faith which sees Him and trusts to Him, in these two aspects, *first*, as *God's love to us*; *secondly*, as *God's gift for us*. In the first, we see that we are not condemned, but loved;

in the second, we see that we are as sinners dependent wholly on that which He does for us. Condemnation there is in the Cross, but condemnation is not the purpose for which the Cross is raised. The doctrine of Atonement is not explicitly taught to Nicodemus; but implicitly it is conveyed. There is condemnation in the Cross. Why? Because there is justification in the Cross. This seems the reasoning of the following verses.

"He that believeth on Him, is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Here, we must be struck by the introduction of a new description of Faith, "he hath not believed *in the name of the only begotten Son of God*." We have before, "*in Him*," the person being the immediate object. Why is the "*name*" here introduced as the object of faith, for the preposition is the same in both cases, "*in the name*," "*in Him*?" To believe *in the name* must be to trust the person to be, for us, what he is named. Now, where is the name of the only begotten Son of God? The Apostle Paul connects it with the Cross. "*Wherefore* (because He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross) *God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.*" It is the name of glory obtained by the Cross; the name of "*Lord*, to

the glory of God the Father." One who does not acknowledge the glory of God in the Cross is condemned already, for he is left without salvation.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

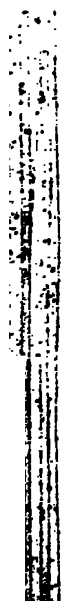
That is to say, we may look at the trial of mankind in a more general way. The Cross of Christ, the name of the only begotten Son of God, is light come into the world. By that light all men are judged. He that doeth the Truth, that is, he that lives by the light of the Truth, cometh to the light of God in the greatest manifestation of the Truth. He that lives in the darkness of evil deeds, having no light of God in him, cometh not to the light of God in the only begotten Son. This is the condemnation of his state, as darkness opposed to light, as a life, not of deeds wrought *in* God, but of deeds wrought *against* God.

Doubtless, this conclusion of the conversation is pointed to the conscience of Nicodemus. The good and the evil were like light and darkness contending for victory in his heart. The light of God was now inviting him to faith. Did he really love light? Did



he hate his own sinfulness? Did he long for such a salvation as would bring him into entire union with God, so that his life would be "*in God?*" Then he would come to the light by faith.

And, while Nicodemus is thus warned and encouraged, the great critical fact of Redemption is placed before the conscience of the whole world. There has been, in the Cross of Christ, a lifting up of the light of God upon the darkness of men. It is the light of Divine love! Every heart must be tried by that light, whether it will come *to* it or go *from* it. And this is the condemnation, that God is not loved. Wherever such choice of love is not distinctly made, there, we may hope, the condemnation is not pronounced. Wherever the love of God, in the light of the only begotten Son, is rejected, and the love of darkness, in evil deeds, is wilfully retained, there is the condemnation, and to all such the Son of God is reproof and destruction. The light which saves is the light which shall also make manifest. The life which is wrought in God, is the life which shall be eternally in God—the life which God works out Himself after His own purpose, and in His own glory!





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